

# **Is it cool to be a Jew? – Significance of Jewishness for young American Jews at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat</p> <p>Young Jewish adults at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were more integrated into American culture than previous generations. However, they did not hide their Jewishness, but continued to embrace certain aspects of it, and were proud of being Jewish. Due to famous Jews in the entertainment business, Jewish characters in popular television series, and new Jewish counterculture, such as the magazine <i>Heeb</i>, Jewishness in early 21<sup>st</sup>-century America appeared to be “cooler” than ever.</p> <p>In this study, I examine what kinds of ways of being a Jew and expressing Jewishness there were among young American Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How did they see themselves compared with the previous generations, for example concerning their stance towards Israel? I will also examine what attitudes young Jews had towards other American culture, how their Jewishness was seen in everyday life, and what significance their Jewishness had for them.</p> <p>Previous studies have shown that the younger generation of American Jews were more open towards new ways of expressing Jewishness, considered changes in Jewish culture as positive, and created these changes themselves. On the other hand, the older generation, especially those affiliated with the Jewish establishment, were more concerned about the future of Judaism in the United States, mainly due to the rising rates of Jews marrying non-Jews. Previous studies have also addressed the older generation’s concern about the tendency of Israel becoming less meaningful for young American Jews.</p> <p>In this study, my main sources are two magazines made by and for young Jewish adults: national Jewish student magazine <i>New Voices</i>; and <i>Heeb</i>, which was a countercultural magazine for “hipster Jews”. <i>New Voices</i> material shows that the editors had critical views on the American Jewish community and its attempts to tackle the issues around intermarriage and attitudes towards Israel. The magazine also featured a number of texts in which young American Jews pondered their Jewishness and its significance in their lives. New York - based <i>Heeb</i> was a radical and humorous magazine that took a stand on social and political issues. Through irony and sarcasm, which were a commonplace in hipsterism, <i>Heeb</i> created humor but also addressed Jewish themes in a highly inclusive way and displayed pride in being Jewish. To show what the “cool Jewishness” phenomenon brought to the American Jewish culture and how it was used, I analyze Lisa Klug’s book <i>Cool Jew</i>, which compiles new expressions of Jewishness and tries to engage young Jews more with Judaism.</p>			
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<b>I Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Research questions, sources and methods .....	1
2. Jews in the United States .....	12
3. American culture at the dawn of a new millennium .....	17
<b>II Young American Jews' expressions of Jewishness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.....</b>	<b>22</b>
1. The American Jew and the unique challenge.....	22
2. "Nuggets of Sarcasm" – Jewishness in Heeb.....	32
3. "News and Views of Campus Jews" – Jewishness in New Voices .....	44
<b>III Views on Israel and U.S. politics.....</b>	<b>56</b>
1. Israel and Zionism in American Jewish culture .....	56
2. American Politics and Israel in the writings in Heeb and New Voices .....	62
3. Pro-Israel or Pro-Palestine? – Conflicting views at campuses .....	69
<b>IV Social dimensions in the life of young American Jews .....</b>	<b>79</b>
1. Intermarriage and engagement to the Jewish community .....	79
2. Sexuality and gender.....	90
3. Jewish food culture, kosher and vegetarianism .....	96
<b>V Is it cool to be a Jew? .....</b>	<b>103</b>
1. Cool Jewishness and hipster Judaism .....	103
2. Lisa Klug's interpretation of cool Jewishness.....	109
<b>VI Conclusions.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>VII Bibliography.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Primary sources .....</b>	<b>123</b>
Printed Sources.....	123
Internet sources.....	123
<b>Secondary sources .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>VIII Index of names .....</b>	<b>138</b>



# I Introduction

## **1. Research questions, sources and methods**

When I began pondering the topic of this thesis, heard about Lisa Alcalay Klug's book *Cool Jew* and its ideas, and read some articles on the *Heeb* website, the first question I asked myself was: Is it true that it was cool to be a Jew in the United States in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century? Due to these findings, famous Jews in the entertainment business and Jewish characters in popular television series, my first image of Jewishness in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggested it was.

Soon this question widened into a series of questions about young Jews in the United States. What ways of being a Jew were there in the 21<sup>st</sup> century United States? I wanted to find out how did the younger generation posit themselves in relation to the older generations. Was their Jewishness different compared with earlier generations and if it was, what had changed and why? As Israel and Holocaust have traditionally been important themes within Jewish culture, I wanted to find out what kind of stance towards these subjects did the younger generation take. In general, was connection to previous generations of Jews, experienced through family histories, still meaningful for the younger generation of American Jews, and if it was, how was it described or seen? To understand these patterns, I tried to get an image of what degree of historical consciousness did the young Jews have. As I researched material that was mainly just about young Jews, this viewpoint was the way to see how this generation possibly differed from the previous ones.

Another group of questions arose about young Jews' views and beliefs concerning social issues, Jewish faith and Jewish tradition. What role did faith have in the views of young American Jews? Did their connection with Jewish tradition affect their social life in its varying forms? Did the young Jews want to either exclude themselves or mingle with their non-Jewish peers? These questions could be combined by asking: what significance Jewishness had for young American Jews?

Why then is it meaningful to research this? The United States is a home of a huge Jewish population. Finding out how Judaism among young Jews looked like in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can give a picture of where Judaism is going in the future decades. One gets an image that it was considered cool to be Jewish and many of the young Jews found in my sources seem like liberal, cosmopolitan

world-citizens. I wanted to find out if this picture was actually truthful and if it was, where could this trend be taking American Judaism in the future. This was one of the viewpoints I could look my sources from.

Main sources of this study are American magazines that had a young Jewish audience and which were mainly written by young American Jewish adults. These magazines are my lens into the life of young Jews. This study examines what Judaism and Jewishness look like in these media. I have founded this study on an assumption that those Jewish magazines which were aimed at young audience were able to give a picture of how was it like to be a young Jew in the United States at the beginning of the new millennium. Basically, this is a study about magazines and how they present the theme I am researching. Yet it is reasonable to assume that these magazines showed most of the characteristics of the life of young Jews.

In this study, I focused on two magazines, *Heeb* and *New Voices*. They are Jewish American publications and aimed especially for young audience. *New Voices*, a Jewish student magazine, was both written and read by young Jews, which made it an obvious choice for this study. *Heeb* was written and published by young Jewish adults and the media coverage of *Heeb* suggests that it influenced the views and culture of urban, young American Jews.<sup>1</sup>

*Heeb* is a Jewish “multi-media”, which was founded in Brooklyn, New York in 2001. It began as a printed magazine but since 2010 continued only as a weblog. On its own website it says: “Heeb has become a multi-media magnet to the young, urban and influential”.<sup>2</sup> This statement and the appearance of the magazine clearly indicate that its target audience were young, urban Jews. Professor Laurence Roth saw that it was the “sound and style” of the age group 18–35 that *Heeb* targeted.<sup>3</sup> *Heeb* can be seen as a part of “New Jewish media” within Jewish nonestablishment, in contrary with the mainstream Jewish media that is linked with the established Jewish community.<sup>4</sup> The circulation of *Heeb* after four published issues in October 2003 was, according to the *New York Times*, “less than 20,000”.<sup>5</sup> The number seems to have risen slightly, as the

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<sup>1</sup> For example in 2010, *Jewish Journal* stated that *Heeb* had become the “the unofficial authority for hipster Jews”. Berkma 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Berkma 2010; About Heeb [2014].

<sup>3</sup> Roth 2007, 119.

<sup>4</sup> Benor 2011, 121.

<sup>5</sup> Werde 2003.



circulation of “the Sex Issue” in 2005 was 30,000<sup>6</sup> and the circulation of the last printed issue of *Heeb* in 2010 was 25,000.<sup>7</sup>

In 2001, when the publication of the first issue of *Heeb* was under consideration, Jennifer Bleier, the founder of the magazine, stated that the editors did not consider themselves as “the spokespeople for the young Jewish generation”. Instead, as Bleier put it: “We’re just trying to hold a mirror up to it and reflect what’s going on.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, at least at the beginning, *Heeb* did not try to take a stand on issues, but instead show and publish various views that could be heard within the young Jewish community.

In this study, I used an archive that *Heeb* has on its website, but unfortunately it does not include copies or full documents of the original printed magazines. What is found in the archive is a selection of articles, interviews and a series of short pieces called *Urban Kvetch*.<sup>9</sup> In 2007, *Heeb* also began to publish a blog alongside the magazine, and I have used some of these blog texts as a material as well. However, as the selection is, I believe, only a part of the original material, it does not give a full picture of the magazine. The makers of the archive have decided to include some articles and leave some out and this might affect the image it gives. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that those who made the decisions on what to put in the archive decided to take in the articles they thought were the most important or presented the magazine’s style best. I have kept these viewpoints in mind when researching the *Heeb* archives.

When reading the archives of *Heeb*, what I was trying to find out was the way the writers wrote about Jewishness, about being a Jew. Of the various texts and articles in *Heeb*, I analyzed those which presented either ways of being a Jew or the writers’ views on topics related to Jewishness. I tried to find out how did the magazine comment or describe characteristics of either Jewishness or Judaism as a religion. When reading the interviews, I analyzed why the makers had decided to interview the people they did, what kind of themes they wanted to cover and what to ask. The main question I kept in mind was: what do these articles reveal about the makers’ and readers’ views about being a Jew?

*New Voices* is the only Jewish student magazine for college students in the United States. It was founded in 1991 by Jewish Student Press Service. On its

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<sup>6</sup> Joshua Neuman 2007 b.

<sup>7</sup> Kohn 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The word *kvetch* originates from Yiddish and means constant complaining.

website *New Voices* states that its aim was to create “a Jewish media that speaks to young Jews”, and to empower “Jewish students to take ownership of their heritage”.<sup>10</sup> In accordance with the motto “news and views of campus Jews”, the magazine published news and articles from the viewpoint of Jewish students. The magazine has a tradition of having a young, recent college graduate Jew as its producer and it states that its policy is to be “proudly run by young and inexperienced”.<sup>11</sup> As *New Voices* was a student magazine, it is very likely that all or most of the writers were students or recent graduates. The magazine also asked their readers to send them texts about their experiences as Jews<sup>12</sup>, and there also were a good number of these kind of texts in the web archive I read. When reading the web archive of *New Voices*, I tried to pick up recurrent themes and find out what was meaningful and important in the everyday life of Jewish college students. This was also an instrument for me to form the thematical partition of the chapters in this study.

Mik Moore – an editor of *New Voices* from 1996 to 1998 – has said that during his time in the magazine, the makers of *New Voices* had traditionally been politically progressive or radical. His opinion was that as political right and centre were already well presented in “mainstream Jewish publications”, he made *New Voices* openly left.<sup>13</sup> An editor of *New Voices*, Melissa Harvis Renny, wrote in 2004 that in her view, *New Voices* “gives young people the power to communicate their views, to wrestle with their identity with no holds barred, and to create a Jewish culture entirely their own”.<sup>14</sup> This quotation by one the editors of the magazine reveals what the mission of *New Voices* was and what it possibly achieved, although it of course does not necessarily mean this was also the experience of the readers.

In the last main chapter, I widen the picture from the magazines of young Jews to a book by Lisa Alcalay Klug, *Cool Jew – The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe*, which was published 2008. The book was a humorous guidebook to “Cool Jewishness”. It presented the idea that it is cool to be Jew, whether you were a religious, secular, liberal, conservative, active or passive Jew. Before publishing *Cool Jew*, Klug, Conservative Jew herself, was already an

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<sup>10</sup> About us [2015].

<sup>11</sup> Wilensky 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *New Voices* 2003 a.

<sup>13</sup> Moore 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Harvis Renny 2004.

experienced journalist and author.<sup>15</sup> Her book *Cool Jew* was selected as a source for this study as it can be seen as a reaction to the trends of Jewishness of young American Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also addresses one of the main themes of this research: How to be a Jew in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The phenomenon of “cool Jewishness”, which Klug’s book reflected, is discussed further in the last chapter.

The time frame of this study was formed as a process. The original focus in this thesis was on the young generation of Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The sources that were available have specified the time frame. Early on in the process of writing this thesis I decided to include in this study an analysis of Lisa Klug’s book and its connection with the cool Jewishness. The book was published in 2008 and it reflected the currents and trends that its author saw happening in the United States. According to Klug, one of the catalysts of this trend was *Heeb* magazine, which was founded in 2001. Thus, I decided to read through the archives of *Heeb* from its first issue, published in early 2002, until around the publication of Klug’s book, in other words, until the end of 2007. For this study, I read around 120 *Heeb* articles – some of them only excerpts of the original articles – that were published in printed issues numbered 1–15 between 2002–2007. In addition, I read 80 short articles in *Urban Kvetch* series and roughly 320 *Heeb* blog texts, which were mainly quite short and published in 2007. *New Voices* was another magazine that seemed to fit in this study perfectly, as it was a Jewish student magazine, whose readers and editors were college students or recent graduates – or in other words, young Jews. The web archive of *New Voices* was available from 2002 onwards, so it was reasonable to cover the same time frame, from 2002 until 2007. This meant that I read nearly 300 articles of *New Voices*. The two magazines showed the trends and “hot topics” among young American Jewry in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Klug’s book acted as an example and as a sort of a compilation of what these trends led to.

Outside the actual time frame, I have referred to several other articles of *New Voices* and *Heeb* and of Jewish and non-Jewish newspapers and magazines. I have not went through exhaustively any other sources than the ones mentioned above, but these other articles have been a significant aid to understand and evaluate my main sources. I have found these other articles mainly by searching general information about my main sources on the internet, using Google. This is an obvious advantage one has when researching times this modern.

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<sup>15</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008; Klug 2008.

When scanning through the studies to refer to in this study, I noticed that it was not easy to find research about young American Jews specifically. Fortunately, I did find several articles from two American journals of Jewish studies, *Shofar* and *Contemporary Jewry*, that addressed precisely young American Jews and supported the findings of this study. The issue four of 2007 of *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, addressed the phenomenon of cool Jewishness from different angles, for example in relation to Sarah Jessica Parker, and the film *Meet the Fockers*. An article about *Heeb* and other oppositional Jewish culture in the same issue supported my findings in a very useful way. The issue 30 of *Contemporary Jewry* in 2010 was dedicated to a debate about the “distancing hypothesis” that Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman had previously put forward. The hypothesis was that young American Jews were increasingly less attached to Israel and would continue to be so in the future. The issue included around 20 short articles by other scholars of Jewish studies that commented on the hypothesis and its opponents’ views. In this discussion, I found many similarities with my findings in the chapter three of this study, and they will be addressed later in that chapter. In addition, the issue 32 of *Contemporary Jewry* in 2012 included an article by Charles Kadushin, Graham Wright, Michelle Shain and Leonard Saxe that addressed the question: “How socially integrated into mainstream America are young American Jews?” Their article gave useful insights to this study as well, especially the chapter about intermarriage and engagement in the Jewish community.

There is also a study from 2011 that addresses quite specifically this topic, *The New Jewish Leaders*, which is a compiled work edited by Jack Wertheimer. In the book, several scholars of Jewish studies – such as Steven M. Cohen, Sylvia Barack Fishman, Sarah Bunin Benor and Wertheimer himself – addressed themes around young Jewish leaders, in other words, leading figures of Jewish organizations, cultural collectives and Jewish media. Their findings about the young Jewish Americans’ views about Jewish organizational life, along with degree and form of engagement in Jewish activities resonate with what I found in *Heeb* and *New Voices*. The makers of these Jewish media that could be called nonestablishment or “countercultural” can be counted as young Jewish leaders.

There was also many works that touched upon the subject, mainly through analyzing the future of American Judaism. Shaul Magid’s study *American Post-Judaism: identity and renewal in a postethnic society* from 2013 was one of these

key studies for me understand the recent currents of research on American Judaism. Magid's main theme is the challenge of Judaism to adapt itself to the 21<sup>st</sup> century American culture. Another useful study was *Speaking of Jews* by Lila Corwin Berman. In the study, Berman discussed how rabbis and Jewish intellectuals explained Judaism to non-Jews during the twentieth century and how this eventually affected the self-understanding of American Jews and their expressions of Jewishness. Berman also presented the concept of "volitional Jewishness", which helped me to understand the contemporary Jewish self-understanding and its historical background. The term refers to an idea of Jewishness being a matter of choice instead of something that can be objectively defined.<sup>16</sup> Extremely useful was also an exhaustive basic work *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, published in 2005, which helped to see the big picture of American Judaism.

Statistical information about American Jewry I received mainly through the surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center (PRC), especially a major work from 2013 on American Jews, their demography and views. The previous survey of somewhat similar scale on American Jews was done in 2001, but it is not used as much in this study, as it is older and less exhaustive than the one by the PRC. The PRC survey was largely commented on – also from the viewpoint of the younger generation of Jews – in *American Jewish Year Book* in 2014. The articles in this anthology were useful in putting the findings of this study in context.

Another useful text to support the findings of this study was the article "The Hipster Curse: The Judaism Rebooters" by David G. Myers in *Commentary* magazine in 2009. The article addressed many of those aspects of the Jewishness of young American Jews that are addressed in this study as well. *Commentary* is not an academic journal, but an intellectually based, conservative Jewish magazine, so the article is most likely not a peer-reviewed research. However, the author David G. Myers was a Professor of English and blogger, and with *Commentary*'s reputation as an intellectual journal, there does not seem to be a reason to question the insights of the article. Myers clearly took a critical stand on the phenomenon he called "Hipster Judaism". I refer to the article several times in this study, and I have taken the characteristics of the magazine and the article into account when doing so.

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<sup>16</sup> Berman 2009, 171–172.

The terms Judaism, Jewishness and Jew have a crucial role in the study, so I will begin by briefly explaining how they are used in this work. Judaism refers to the religion of the Jews. The term can be seen as representing the entirety consisting of Jewish traditions, beliefs and Jews both within the Jewish community and outside of it. As Jewish tradition and Jewish life consist of also many other aspects than religious beliefs, I use the term Jewishness when I talk about “a way of being a Jew or Jewish” in other than only religious meaning. The sources of this study often concentrate on young Jews’ varying ways to be part of the Jewish tradition and to participate in their communities as Jews and not so much evaluating their religious beliefs. Thus, I tend to use the term Jewishness more often than Judaism. Jewishness as a term is useful when explaining the ways in which the Jews express their heritage, tradition or identity without specifically referring to religious beliefs. For example Lila Corwin Berman uses the term “Jewishness” predominantly instead of for example Judaism or Jewish identity in her study *Speaking of Jews* in 2009.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, David Kaufman wrote in 2012 that recently especially the students of Jewish culture had begun to use “Jewishness” as a synonym for “Jewish identity”. Kaufman wrote:

Both terms signify the qualitative and psychological state of being Jewish – or the subjective perception of another’s Jewishness – and so reflect the ever-changing and enigmatic nature of the Jewish experience.<sup>18</sup>

This study does not explicitly attempt to define the Jewish identity of young American Jews. Defining Jewish identity in general seems to have always been a difficult and complex task, and many studies have concentrated mainly on this topic only.<sup>19</sup> Questions whether Judaism is inherited or a matter of choice, or whether it is a religious identity or an ethnic identity, constantly come up in the studies about Judaism. There seems not to be a consensus of what Jewish identity consists of, or at least it can be said that it varies much. What this study does, however, is to show the ways young Jews expressed their Jewishness and wrote about it, and to explain thoughts and views behind these expressions. This is also the reason why I tend to use the term “Jewishness” instead of “Jewish identity” in this study, thus following the tendency Berman and Kaufman expressed.

It is, however, reasonable to give a very basic level definition of Jewish identity before continuing. I will first address the term “identity” as such. Sociologist Steph Lawler explains that identity as a concept cannot be fully

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<sup>17</sup> Berman 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Kaufman 2012, 24.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Gitelman 2009, Sharot 2011 and Greenspoon 2014.

defined, as the definition depends on the way the concept is analyzed. A usual categorization is that an identity of a person consists of both public and personal manifestations of identities. Sometimes also a third form, “felt identity”, is added. The current understanding of identity within social studies is that it is not essential, or in other words, something within the person, but instead it is constructed, or in other words, produced through social relations. This means that all forms of identity are ongoing processes that are affected by social relations. Identity categories are also often formed through opposition: through being similar or different with something else and thus being within some categories and outside the others.<sup>20</sup>

When discussing Jewish identity, it seems that traditionally this identity has been seen as inherited through ethnicity, but in contemporary world, it is seen more like that Jewish identity is constructed from the aspects one chooses to adopt.<sup>21</sup> By quick glance at studies about Jewish identity, it is possible to broadly name the most common ways in which the Jewish identity is, then, constructed and expressed. For example, according to the Pew Research Center survey in 2013, the aspects that were considered the most important in Jewish identity were remembering the Holocaust, leading ethical life, working for equality, and fourthly, being intellectually curious. It is also clear that some sort a relationship with Israel is a usual part of Jewish identity. Interestingly, being part of the Jewish community was considered as essential only by 26% of the young participants of the survey. In addition, the majority of young American Jews in the survey considered that being Jewish was more a matter of ancestry, culture and values than of religious observance.<sup>22</sup>

How to define the word “Jew” then? Leonard Levin explains it as follows: In an objective view, a Jew is anyone born of a Jewish mother or who has legitimately converted to Judaism. In a subjective view, a Jew is anyone who:

—[has] a critical mass of Jewish memes [=cultural ideas] – such as Jewish knowledge, values, religious commitments or cultural memories – together with the marker: ‘This applies to me’; and who personally identifies him/herself with the “Jewish narrative”.<sup>23</sup>

As mentioned concerning Jewish identity, the discussion about who can be considered a Jew is not simple. Levin’s explanation is only one version but it includes important aspects. On one hand, there are matrilineality and legitimate

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<sup>20</sup> Lawler 2014, 2, 7–8, 10–12.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Magid 2013, 2 and the idea of “volitional Jewishness” in Berman 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 47, 54, 57.

<sup>23</sup> Levin 2014, 30.

conversion, which are definite rules to the most traditional Jewish groups. On the other hand, subjective experience is in some instances enough for a person to define oneself as a Jew.

In this study I often use the terms “young Jews” or “younger generation of Jews”, and occasionally “young Jewish adults”. “Young Jews” as a subject becomes defined through the sources and studies that are used, not through a strictly defined age limits. *New Voices* is a student magazine, so its target group are college student Jews. *Heeb* magazine defines itself on its website as “a multi-media magnet to the young, urban and influential” and elsewhere it was described as the “the unofficial authority for hipster Jews”<sup>24</sup>. Hipsterism is explained more widely later, but sufficient for now is to say that it was a trend among young, urban adults.

Another term to define, especially often used in the *New Voices* texts, is “Jewish community”. In their texts, the term seems to refer to Jewish organizations and synagogues; influential Jews and specifically, the older generations of Jews. In this sense it seems that these writers do not include themselves in this “community”. As an example, an editor of *New Voices*, Daniela Gerson, refers to the “established” Jewish community, which in her opinion was rarely saying anything young Jews wanted to hear.<sup>25</sup> According to Jack Wertheimer and Steven M. Cohen in 2011, young Jewish people also often saw the establishment Jewish organizations as exclusive or judgmental, when they for example organized events where non-Jews or same-sex partners were not welcome. Young Jews saw that the Jewish establishment sustained needless divisions between Jews and non-Jews, and between different kinds of Jews.<sup>26</sup>

I will now offer a brief overview of the structure of this study. The introduction includes the historical background of Judaism in America and some characteristics of the American culture in the times briefly before and during the time period researched here. In the chapter two I present discussion about different ways of being Jewish and expressing Jewishness in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After this, I present the main features of the style in which *Heeb* and *New Voices* presented Jewishness in the time period that is studied in this work. In the chapter three, I focus on two topics: young Jews’ views on Israel and views on the politics of the United States. In the chapter four, the focus is on

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<sup>24</sup> Berkma 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Gerson 2002 b. Inverted commas by the original author.

<sup>26</sup> Wertheimer 2011 a, 4; Cohen 2011, 81.



themes around social dimensions of the life of young Jews, such as marrying outside faith; sexuality, and food culture. The fifth chapter addresses the phenomenon of “cool Jewishness” first through different media and then through Lisa Klug’s book *Cool Jew*.

In the end of this introduction, I will explain few technical details of this work. In both internet archives I have used – *New Voices* and *Heeb* – there seems to be a tendency that some of the articles are credited to a different person than to the actual writer. This has become clear in several instances, for example in texts that include very personal and detailed stories or experiences. For clarity, in the footnotes and the list of sources these articles are listed according to the credited writers – to be sure that the original text can easily be traced – but in the text I have made it clear if these are likely not the actual authors of the text. In addition, some of the *Heeb* articles, which in the web archive are specified to have been published in a printed issue, are dated much later than the original issue. The announced date is probably the day when the text was uploaded to the web archive. For the reader to be able to know when the text was originally published, I have put in brackets the publication year of the issue which the text was part of.

For clarity in the the list of sources, I have put all the material found in the web archives of *New Voices* and *Heeb* under the title “Internet sources”. Some of the texts that are found there are probably in the same form as in the original printed editions, which would give a reason to put them under “Printed sources”, but as I cannot be sure of this, and many texts are clearly not in the original form, I have decided to gather all this similar material under the same title. Some of the texts are credited in the web archive systems to just “Heeb”, “New Voices” or “New Voices Staff”, and in some cases, the actual writer was unknown, but I decided to put them to the same list with the same system anyhow. Also worth mentioning, as all the articles of both archives are individually listed in the list of sources, this has made the list perhaps unusually long for a work of this length.

Especially in the archives of *Heeb*, majority of the texts are credited to pseudonyms; and in the footnotes and the list of sources I have decided to use their original way of writing. Thus, in the footnotes, texts are credited to “jessie”, not Jessie. Most likely behind this nickname, to which a vast amount of *Heeb* articles are credited, is Jessie Bodzin, who worked as the managing editor of *Heeb*

in 2007.<sup>27</sup> Another aspect to mention about the archives of *Heeb* is that it is unfortunately quite limited and in many occasions includes only excerpts of the original articles. However, I have used some of these when already the excerpts have proved to be useful sources. For further studies it would be extremely useful to be able to use physical copies or fully digitalized issues of the magazine. Unfortunately, it was not possible to do it in this process yet.

## **2. Jews in the United States**

When the United States became independent in 1776, there were 2,500 Jews in the country. Article VI of the Constitution of 1789 gave those Jews religious freedom at the official level. However, unofficial restrictions to enter certain venues or institutions were not uncommon and some of them remained until the twentieth century. Still, in general, the United States was a good place for Jews and they were treated well.<sup>28</sup>

The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a great growth in the number of Jews. From 1800 until 1870 the number grew from around 10,000 to 300,000, whereas the following decade saw immigration of nearly one and a half million Jews to America. In just a few decades the number doubled so that in 1915 there was 3 million Jews in the United States. In 1917 there were 1.5 million Jews in New York City, which made it the largest center of Jewish life in history.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of the immigrated German Jews became solidly middle-class citizens and there were stories of great success, such as the Guggenheim family and that of Levi Strauss, who founded the global brand Levi's. At the same time, the vast majority of the eastern European Jewish immigrants were industrial workers, whose appearance, language and Left-wing political ideologies were in sharp contradiction with the culture of German immigrants. Often the "uptown" German Jews owned the factories where "downtown" eastern European Jews worked, which led to class struggles in which Jews were on both sides.<sup>30</sup> Ashkenazic Jews from central and eastern Europe formed the majority of the Jews in America but there was also a smaller group of Sephardic Jews whose ancestors were the Jews in the Iberian peninsula in the Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Smith 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Efron et al 2014, 277.

<sup>29</sup> Efron et al 2014, 359, 364.

<sup>30</sup> Efron et al 2014, 360, 363–364.

<sup>31</sup> Raphael 2003, 41.

Nevertheless, American Jewish groups from different status and backgrounds around Europe had connective factors: a sense of ethnic solidarity and strong opposition against marrying outside community, in other words, intermarriage. When all the Jewish groups began to become increasingly American, the European background of the immigrants began to lose its meaning. As time passed, by the outbreak of World War I, the Jewish community had become more united.<sup>32</sup>

The Great Depression, made the 1930s a difficult time for Jewish congregations. The focus of American Jewry was on the Jewish crisis in Europe and giving aid to those in need, which led Jewish religious life to lose significance. American Jewish funds were used to help the Jews in Europe, but at the same time many members dropped out as they were not able to pay the synagogue dues. It is approximated that around 150,000 Jews emigrated from Germany and Austria to the United States between 1933–1939. Most of the immigrants were professional, middle-class men, who had trouble in assimilating in America in the middle of the depression. Some of the German refugees were known rabbis, intellectuals and scholars.<sup>33</sup>

In the inter-war period, American Jewry had assimilated more firmly to the American culture, and around 550,000 American Jews served in the World War II. This helped Jews to come out of the margins. As a part of the assimilation process, English passed Hebrew as the most important language in modern Jewish culture. After the World War II, the American Jewish community became the largest and the most influential in the world. This was due to its demography: the community consisted mostly of middle- and upper-middle-class citizens, which led to economic power.<sup>34</sup>

The political situation of the next several years after the World War II complicated the American people's attitude towards the victims of the Holocaust. When the Cold War broke out around 1948, Germany had become their ally against the Soviet Union. Until the end of the 1950s, talking about the Holocaust was somewhat embarrassing and it was nearly non-existent both in American public discourse and in Jewish public discourse.<sup>35</sup> Coverage of Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1963 made American people more aware of the truth about the events at

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<sup>32</sup> Efron et al 2014, 362–364.

<sup>33</sup> Gartner 2005, 54–56.

<sup>34</sup> Efron et al 2014, 458, 460.

<sup>35</sup> Novick 2001, 83–86, 103.

the concentration camps during the World War II, and thus the Holocaust became an entity of its own, distinct from the other Nazi atrocities. The term “holocaust” became widely used after the press began using it when reporting from the trial. However, the wider discussion and awareness of the events did not actualize until the late 1970s.<sup>36</sup>

The 1960s saw the great suburbanization of already rather secularized American Jewry. The synagogues were increasingly becoming the centers of communal life, instead of traditional devotion. All this made American Judaism to be more compatible with American civil religion.<sup>37</sup> There was also opposition to American Jewish suburban culture as it was seen to lead to a cultural loss. It was a commonplace for Jewish comedians, who were especially drawn to stand-up comedy, to ridicule postwar authority and the new Jewish culture and lifestyle.<sup>38</sup> Jews achieved economic, political and cultural success and thus began to secure their spot in American society. The next generation, however, began to rebel against their parents’ lifestyle, and the same era produced new Jewish popular culture in its all forms, like novels, music, theatre, visual arts and radio.<sup>39</sup> The 1960s was also an era of the new generation of Jewish celebrities, such as comedian Lenny Bruce, singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, actress Barbra Streisand and also Sandy Koufax, baseball player who famously refused to play on a Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur. David Kaufman wrote a study in 2012 about these four celebrities and the habit of Jews to be extremely interested in their famous “fellow members of the tribe”, a habit that has likely begun around the early 1960s.<sup>40</sup>

In April 1978, NBC showed the first episode of television series *Holocaust*. Nearly 100 million Americans watched the series, which began to open the discussion around the subject like never before. The Jewish community also saw it as a tool to inform non-Jews and Jews themselves alike about the events and promoted it with great measure. Watching the series was seen even as an essential action to sustain one’s Jewish identity. Other series addressing the topic were made later but they never achieved such a status as *Holocaust*, until *Schindler’s list* became nearly a similar phenomenon in 1993. The film, all the series, and the

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<sup>36</sup> Novick 2001, 133, 144–145.

<sup>37</sup> Efron et al 2014, 460. For civil religion, see the work of Robert N. Bellah, e.g. Bellah & Hammond 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Efron et al 2014, 462.

<sup>39</sup> Berman 2009, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Kaufman 2012, 4–5.

opening of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. in 1993, gave the Holocaust a firm spot in the American cultural sphere.<sup>41</sup>

Different forms of political and social activism in the 1970s and 1980s affected Judaism. Jewish women were an important part in the Second Wave feminism from the 1960s to 1980s, Jewish feminist magazine *Lilith* was founded 1973 and gradually the Reform (1972), Reconstructionist (1974) and Conservative Judaism (1985) ordained their first female rabbis. In the 1980s, also gay Jews began to establish their own synagogues.<sup>42</sup>

In the last decades of the twentieth century, more clearly than before, American Judaism began to separate into two different forms of Jewishness. One side committed themselves firmly to the Jewish culture and tried to find ways to secure the continuity of Judaism. The other side became more secular and participated increasingly less in the organized Jewish life. Different Jewish groups reacted to this phenomenon in different ways. Many quarters launched various outreach programs aimed to unaffiliated Jews. One of the ultra-Orthodox, Hasidic groups called Lubavitch was especially active among young Jews and it established so-called “Chabad Houses” at campuses around the country. Reform Judaism approached intermarried couples by accepting non-Jewish spouses to participate in the life of the congregation. Efron et al estimated that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, about 2 million out of 5 million American Jews were unaffiliated. This mainly means that they did not participate in Jewish communal activities, but were Jews by choice.<sup>43</sup>

America has been a good place for Jewish denominations to seek and perform their own expressions of Judaism. Since the first few centuries of the common era until around 1800, rabbinic Judaism that was concentrated around the rabbis was mainly the only form of Judaism. Modern Judaisms, of which the most significant were Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, and later Reconstructionist, emerged as a response to the challenges that rabbinic Judaism faced in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. America was a fertile ground for reforms within Judaism with its liberal, individualistic and nonconformist atmosphere and the lack of tradition.<sup>44</sup> This process continued through the nineteenth century so that in 1870 nearly all Judaism in America was moderate

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<sup>41</sup> Novick 2001, 209–214.

<sup>42</sup> Efron et al 2014, 467–468.

<sup>43</sup> Efron et al 2014, 466–468.

<sup>44</sup> Raphael 2003, 46–48.

Reform Judaism.<sup>45</sup> Majority of the young American Jews in the sources of this study seem to have represented more or less this branch of Judaism, or none of the branches especially. There are some exceptions, however.

The arrival of eastern European immigrants made the Orthodox Judaism rise again in the late nineteenth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, Reform and Conservative Judaism had clearly outnumbered Orthodox Judaism, but it experienced a “renaissance” in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The number of Orthodox Jews did not grow but the group became more dedicated.<sup>46</sup> In the end of the twentieth century, the Orthodox community had still grown and was in a more stable state than Reform and Conservative communities that were in decline.<sup>47</sup>

Conservative Judaism was, unofficially, the “middle ground” between Reform and Orthodox Judaism. It is usually seen to have emerged as a response to Reform in the late nineteenth century as it objected some of its “most modern” ideas, for example the use of *Union Prayer Book*, which was largely in English. Still, it opposed the European form of tradition, which the Orthodox Judaism embraced. For example, mixed seating was allowed quite early in some of the Conservative synagogues.<sup>48</sup>

Reconstructionist Judaism has its roots in the work of the Rabbi and Jewish educator Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1983). As a movement, the Reconstructionists found their modern form in the late 1950s. The main goal of the movement was to help the branches of Judaism find ways towards unity. Members of the Reconstructionist movement are therefore encouraged to also belong to a Conservative, Reform or Orthodox congregation.<sup>49</sup>

To conclude the recent history of American Judaism before the new millennium, here is what Peter Novick stated in his study *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* in 1999:

It has become a commonplace in recent years that Israel and the Holocaust are the twin pillars of American Jewish “civil religion” – the symbols that bind together Jews in the United States whether they are believers or nonbelievers, on the political right, left or center.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gartner 2005, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Raphael 2003, 67; Gartner 2005, 45.

<sup>47</sup> Efron et al 2014, 466–467.

<sup>48</sup> Raphael 2003, 63.

<sup>49</sup> Raphael 2003, 68–69.

<sup>50</sup> Novick 2001, 146.

Novick was probably right when he wrote his statement, but as this study will show, younger generation of Jews did acknowledge this background that American Jewish identity had, but began to question it.

### **3. American culture at the dawn of a new millennium**

This chapter pictures the cultural atmosphere of young Americans as it was briefly before and after the turn of the millennium. I will explain in what kind of era the young Jews of this study lived and what events or phenomena affected American culture during that time. I will focus on those cultural factors trends that supposedly affected especially young Americans.

Young American Jews in this study can mainly be seen as being part of the generation of Millennials. The Millennials – sometimes called Generation-Y – are usually seen as those born after the early 1980s. The previous generation before them was Generation-X, or Gen-X, who would be those born around 1965–1980. At least some of the editors of *Heeb* and *New Voices* were probably of also Gen-X. The generation of most of the parents of the Millennials is called the Baby Boomers, born between the end of the World War II in 1945 and 1964.<sup>51</sup>

The first Millennials came of age near the turn of the millennium. In 2000, George W. Bush was elected president as a Republican candidate after Democrat Bill Clinton's eight years in office. The time frame of this study fits fully in the presidency of Bush, which lasted until January 2009. The elections in 2000 ended in confused circumstances; final result was delayed because of confusions in Florida voting and finally the Supreme Court declared Bush the winner. The country was severely divided between Republicans and Democrats. This division could be seen also geographically and racially. Basically east coast, west coast, and the Midwest supported Democrats, and the other states supported Republicans. Clear majorities of African Americans and Latinos voted for the Democrat nominee Al Gore in 2000, and the tendency was similar in 2004 when John Kerry challenged Bush. In the 2004 elections, the division between conservative and liberal values was even more evident than in the previous elections. Kerry and Bush held different views on issues such as abortion and homosexuality, and according to the exit polls, the most important issue for the voters were "moral values", followed by economy and terrorism.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Luttrell & McGrath 2015, 8, 14, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Bigsby 2006, 17, 27–28.

The terror attacks in September 11, 2001 were a national tragedy that dramatically changed the atmosphere of the country. President Bush went to war on terror. In these tense circumstances, his decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 caused controversy and anxiety, both support and opposition. Actions of the Bush administration continued a tendency that began already in the early 1990s. When the United States went to war against Iraq in 1990 after Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait, the administration of George H. W. Bush was also strongly criticized by the Democrats. The Gulf War was the first time after the end of Cold War when the United States used force to solve such situations in foreign countries that did not have a direct effect on Americans, and the country has continued to do so ever since, mainly in the Middle East. The same political division between conservatives and liberals that was developed during the Gulf War in 1990–1991 remained through the 1990s and intensified during the war on terror after the attacks in September 2001.<sup>53</sup>

American politics were also commented on and satirized in popular culture. Michael Moore made controversial documentary films, such as *Fahrenheit 9/11* in 2004, that addressed the post-9/11 policies of Bush administration.<sup>54</sup> Natalie Maines from a country-rock band Dixie Chicks criticized Bush during a concert in London in 2003, only ten days prior to the war in Iraq, by stating spontaneously that she did not support the Iraq war and she was ashamed that Bush was from Texas, the same state that she was. Dixie Chicks were one of the only country music artists who expressed criticism against the war in Iraq. When *The Guardian* made news about this sentiment, the band faced harsh criticism, threats of harm and boycotting from their fan base and country music DJs. This severe reaction is a revealing example of the tensions in the United States during the following years after the terror attacks in 2001. In the public discourse, there became a sharp division between those who were “patriotic” and supportive of Bush administration and military forces, and those who were “unpatriotic” and critical.<sup>55</sup> These examples, Moore and Dixie Chicks, show the tensions that existed between supporters of Bush and his opponents, which in most cases meant basically the division between conservatives and liberals.

South Park, which began as a television series in 1997, was known for its satire that was occasionally directed against the U.S. politics and politicians as

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<sup>53</sup> Chollet & Goldgeier 2008, xv–xvi, 13–16, 208, 318.

<sup>54</sup> For more on Michael Moore and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, see e.g. Weber 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Hart 2005, 161–162, Adolphson 2014.



well.<sup>56</sup> What is more relevant concerning this study, however, is that the series was one of the mainstream popular culture forums that presented Judaism, as one of its main characters, Kyle Broflovski, was Jewish. Later for example *Sex and the City*, with Jewish Sarah Jessica Parker in the leading role, featured a Jewish character, Harry Goldenblatt. Madonna and several other celebrities got into Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, in the early 2000s. According to one of the chief editors of *New Voices*, Melissa Harvis Renny, American culture and Jewish culture were “feeding off each other” around the turn of the millennium:

The Jewish community as a whole is becoming increasingly disorganized, diverse, and American—in both the sense that Jews are becoming more American and America is becoming more Jewish. It’s not that mainstream American culture is devouring Jewish culture. They are feeding off each other. And, if anything, the mainstream is more ravenous for Jewish product—*Seinfeld*, the *Beastie Boys*, Madonna’s Kabbalah fixation. Even Yiddish insults like *shmuck* and *putz* have become part of the nation’s vernacular.<sup>57</sup>

In Harvis Renny’s view, the Jewish community was becoming more diverse and American. She also pointed out the Jewish influence in popular culture, which changed the status of Jewish culture in the United States to a positive direction.

One of the most significant changes in the everyday life that happened near the turn of the millennium was obviously the emergence of the internet. The first Millennials came of age during the time when the centeredness of the internet in everyday life grew exponentially. When the World Wide Web appeared in 1989, there were around 80,000 computers using it, whereas the number was 50 million by the turn of the century.<sup>58</sup> Few years later, social networks grew greatly in popularity. In 2005, only 12% of adults of ages 18–29 used social networking sites, and by 2010, the proportion grew to around 80%.<sup>59</sup> Facebook was launched in 2004 and by September 2006, it became open for everyone to join. Twitter was launched in 2006. These numbers suggest that the earlier source material used in this study was produced during years when the internet mainly helped people to find information, for example about their hobbies, as a Pew Research Center report on “Hobbyists Online” found out. Between 2000–2005, around 40–50% of all American adults used the internet for hobbies, and younger adults were more likely than older to do it.<sup>60</sup> Near the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

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<sup>56</sup> For *South Park*’s satire about the Bush administration, see e.g. Thorogood 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Harvis Renny 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Buhle 2006, 408.

<sup>59</sup> Perrin 2015, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Griffith & Fox 2007, 2–3.

social networking became increasingly more important activity and a form of use of the internet.

Sexual and gender minorities are addressed later in this study, so I find it reasonable to briefly explain the situation of queer Americans in the 1990s and early 2000s. After the struggle against the HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, LGBT people began to become an acknowledged and mainly accepted group in the United States. During the 1990s, worldwide travel industry for LGBT people flourished and for example gay pride merchandise was available in gay neighborhoods. This community was increasingly acknowledged as a significant consumer group. Along with this process, more than before, LGBT people wanted to become integrated and included in social institutions, such as marriage and the military.<sup>61</sup> It is evident that the Millennial generation was generally more open towards LGBT rights than the previous generations. The Millennials were mainly aware of the issues affecting them and especially by the end of the first decade of the 2000s, online activism through social networks became a commonplace.<sup>62</sup> All in all, in the early 2000s, when the sources of this study were published, it was still rather a new phenomenon that the LGBT people were casually included in most spheres of the American culture. On the other hand, for example achieving the acceptance of same-sex marriage was still in progress.

An important trend to present in the introduction of this study is hipsterism, which was clearly connected with the sphere in which *Heeb* was founded and bloomed. The contemporary hipster culture emerged in the “bohemian” area of Williamsburg in New York in the end of the 1990s. Soon it became a larger phenomenon in New York and later a global phenomenon, which led it to become commercialized.<sup>63</sup> Master of Arts, Lauren M. Alfrey has researched the phenomenon in 2010. By looking at the definitions of “hipster” in the website Urban Dictionary<sup>64</sup> from 2004 to 2008, she explains how hipsterism became mainstream during those years.<sup>65</sup>

According to Alfrey, hipsters often cultivated “obscure and eclectic hobbies such as home brewing beer and banjo playing” and sought leisure time in “dive

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<sup>61</sup> McRuer 2006, 229–231.

<sup>62</sup> Luttrell & McGrath 2015, 33.

<sup>63</sup> Alfrey 2010, 29–32.

<sup>64</sup> *Urban Dictionary* is a web community in which the users can write their own unofficial definitions of a term.

<sup>65</sup> Alfrey 2010, 32–33.

bars or local art-houses”.<sup>66</sup> They tended to prefer specific kinds of products and services, such as fairtrade coffee to Starbucks and local pubs to pub chains. Alfrey concludes this as a “search for authenticity”, in which the term “authenticity”, according to her, “suggests at once idealism of the past and an appreciation of the creative”.<sup>67</sup> Along with the aspiration to be distinctive, an ironic attitude, especially towards one’s own appearance was usual among hipsters.<sup>68</sup> In their article about identity signaling, Johah Berger and Chip Heath explain one of the basic aspects of being a hipster: Wearing an indie band T-shirt was a way to signal hipster status. An indie band, in this case, refers to a band that has not made a breakthrough. But after the band has made a breakthrough and everyone owns the same shirt, it could signal the opposite, in other words, that the person just follows trends. It made a difference when was the product bought and used or when was a band listened to.<sup>69</sup> This behavior pattern indicates that in addition to the search for authenticity, hipsters tended to aim at being forerunners, a step ahead of others. These kinds of tendencies could be seen in *Heeb*, for example in presenting “underground” artists and in the centeredness of irony in the style of writing.

One sub-chapter is hardly enough to give an exhaustive picture of the American culture during these years of rapid political and social changes. In this sub-chapter, however, I have presented some of the main characteristics of this era, which hopefully helps to understand the sphere where the young Jews of this study lived. Division between Republicans and Democrats – or in most cases, conservatives and liberals – the emergence of the internet, hipsterism, and the rise of gay rights activism are all phenomena that affected American youth, both Jewish and non-Jewish, during that time.

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<sup>66</sup> Alfrey 2010, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Alfrey 2010, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Alfrey 2010, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Berger & Heath 2007, 123.

## **II Young American Jews' expressions of Jewishness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

### ***1. The American Jew and the unique challenge***

To understand how young Jews expressed their Jewishness and what kind of views they had on American Judaism, I will begin by explaining what kind of state Judaism in America was in during the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I will try to give an image of what American Judaism generally looked like, concerning denominations, the level of religiosity and the significance of Judaism to Jews themselves. This helps to see what phenomena and attitudes young Jews reacted to and why they perhaps had the thoughts and views they had.

American Jews have a broad view of their identities; being Jewish is as much about ethnicity and culture as it is about religious belief and practice. And many Jews defy easy categorization. Some Jews by religion are non-believers, while some Jews of no religion are ritually observant.<sup>70</sup>

This passage in the report by the Pew Research Center in 2013 about Jewish identity shows how complicated a thing Jewish identity is. Looking a bit earlier, the American Jewish Identity Survey in 2001 showed that compared with other American religious groups, Jews had a stronger tendency to consider themselves “secular” rather than “religious”. Of “Jews by religion”, 44% considered themselves “secular” or “somewhat secular” and of “Jews of no religion”, the proportion was 64%. In other religious groups, the number was mainly under 20%.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, proportionally fewer agreed with a belief that “God exists”.<sup>72</sup> When looking at the branches of Judaism in the 2001 survey, Orthodox clearly had the largest group of “religious” (56%) and “somewhat religious” (28%). Conservative and Reform had rather similar numbers compared to each other, the biggest group being “somewhat religious” (Conservative 54%, Reform 43%), “religious” being 7% in both of them. The most secular groups were the Reconstructionist and the groups called “Secular Humanist” and “Just Jewish”. However, also both Reform and Conservative had more than a third of answers in the categories “secular” or “somewhat secular”.<sup>73</sup>

In the Pew Research Center survey in 2013, in the group of Jewish adults born after 1980 – also called “Millennials” in this case – 68% identified themselves as “Jew by religion”, and 32% as “Jew of no religion”. The percentage

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<sup>70</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 71.

<sup>71</sup> Mayer et al 2002, 36.

<sup>72</sup> Mayer et al 2002, 36–37; Kaufman 2005, 169.

<sup>73</sup> Mayer et al 2002, 40.

of the first group, “Jew by religion”, was higher in every other age group, the highest being in the oldest group, Jews born 1914–1927. As in 2001, the proportion of Jews who believed in God was smaller than among the general public of the United States.<sup>74</sup>

The survey in 2013 also showed that of “Jews of no religion”, 66% identified with “No denomination” and 20% with Reform, whereas only 6% of them identified with Conservative and 1% with Orthodox. “Jews by religion” identify with these groups as follows: Reform 40%, Conservative 22%, Orthodox 12%, No denomination 19%. The remaining, small proportion of both groups, Jews by religion or of no religion, identify with “Other Denomination”, including Reconstructionist and other smaller denominations.<sup>75</sup> The survey showed a trend that “Jews of no religion” did not tend to identify with any denomination; however, still nearly one fifth of “Jews by religion” did not consider themselves to be part of any denomination either.

Of the existing denominations, Reform stayed the largest, as it was already in the 2001 survey. In 2001, Conservative seemed to be the second largest group, but in the 2013 survey, the proportion of the group “No denomination” was clearly bigger (total of 30% of the Jewish population) than before, being the second biggest ahead of Conservative (18%).<sup>76</sup> Among younger age groups, the proportions of “No denomination” were higher. Among Jews aged 18–29 in 2013, a total of 41% identified with no denomination, and among Jews aged 30–49, the proportion was 33%.<sup>77</sup>

A Jewish studies scholar, Debra Renee Kaufman, commented on the findings of the 2001 survey. She pointed out that one always needs to interpret the data of a survey, as the numbers themselves are not able to tell much. This is especially the case when the surveys concentrate on such fluid categories like religiosity and beliefs.<sup>78</sup> A compiled work, *American Jewish Year Book 2014*, focused on comments on the Pew Research Center survey. For example, Ari Y. Kelman challenged the whole concept of these kinds of surveys. Kelman stated that he appreciated the findings of the survey but wanted to point out that it was not able to give a full picture of American Jewishness. A survey is able to find out answers only to what it asks, and when these kinds of surveys have traditionally

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<sup>74</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 7, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 48.

<sup>76</sup> Mayer et al 2002, 7; Pew Research Center 2013, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 49.

<sup>78</sup> Kaufman 2005, 169–170.

had a focus on the religious expressions of Judaism – for example by creating lists of choices in accordance with this presumption – it is possible that they exclude some aspects that the Jews of no religion could reveal about their Jewishness.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Deborah Dash Moore criticized the way in which Jews in these surveys are divided into “Jews who count” and “Jews who don’t count”, in other words, Jews by religion and Jews of no religion.<sup>80</sup> These comments suggest that Jewish scholars encouraged new ways of looking at American Judaism. A reason for this was probably that they understood that the expressions of Jewishness were becoming increasingly multiform.

I will now move on to the research that has been done about the state of American Judaism at the beginning of this millennium. An American Professor of Jewish Studies, Shaul Magid presents the view that Judaism in the United States was, at the beginning of the new millennium, in a new phase which presented a great challenge to its essence. Magid argues in his *American Post-Judaism: Identity and renewal in postethnic society* (2013) that as America had become a postethnic society, Judaism entered a phase of “post-Judaism”. Post-Judaism and postethnic are the key terms of Magid’s study. First, I shall explain what he means by postethnic. Magid explains that in American society, ethnicity has become more liquid and it is not as defining a feature of identity as it used to be. When a growing number of Americans, including such influential characters as president Barack Obama, were mixed-race – i.e. their parents were of different ethnic or cultural groups – identity was often no longer inherited through ethnicity, but instead performed or constructed. Constructed identities were also mixed identities. These kinds of aspects made America a postethnic society. Magid states that the postethnic phase had been going on for at least two decades, since the publication of the book *Postethnic America* by David Hollinger.<sup>81</sup> Postethnic does not mean that ethnicity should be dismissed or ignored. Instead, it acknowledges ethnicity as a part of identity but not a binding part. In other words, one’s descent should not determine one’s future.<sup>82</sup>

By diminishing the significance of descent, postethnicity made American Judaism face a unique challenge. The challenge was also created by the circumstances in which Jews have lived in the United States. America has been, at

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<sup>79</sup> Kelman 2015, 57–59.

<sup>80</sup> Moore 2015, 67–70.

<sup>81</sup> Hollinger 1995; Magid 2013, 2, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Magid 2013, 24

least according to the views of Magid, the most tolerant and embracing society for Jews. Jews arrived emancipated and they have never been, as Magid puts it, “the most ‘othered’ Other”. Unlike in Europe, questions about race in America connected strongly to slavery and racism against African Americans. American Jews did experience overt anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s, but, Magid states, it was never as threatening as racism. This setup gave Judaism a huge challenge: How to reconfigure Jewishness beyond ethnicity? Jewish identity had strongly leaned on ethnicity, and especially in the United States, on opposing anti-Semitism. At times when anti-Semitism has not been such an issue in America, American Jewish groups have channeled their concern to anti-Semitism abroad. Magid seems to state that anti-Semitism has been a key part of Jewish identity. As Jews have assimilated well and there are no real threats to them in the United States, they have lost one of the main elements of their identity.<sup>83</sup>

Magid’s statement is that this “unique challenge” led Judaism to the phase of post-Judaism. Post-Judaism is the state in which American Judaism exists between the Jewish spiritual renaissance in the 1970s and 1980s and the future form of Judaism. This phase was a consequence of at least three aspects, which are as follows: structures of ethnicity had collapsed, Jews had assimilated very well to the society and thirdly, there was a constant lack of authority in American religiousness in general. Because of all these processes, Judaism was not able to keep its form but instead it changed. Its exclusiveness was not compatible with the American society, so when Judaism wanted to assimilate, and it did, its essence also changed in the process. Because of postethnicity, along with a growing tendency for intermarriage and a more open attitude towards individual ways of expressing Judaism, Judaism has lost its ethnic roots and entered the “post”-state.<sup>84</sup>

The challenge that Magid explains has been expressed elsewhere as well. Already in 2002, a report about the American Jewish Identity Survey 2001 acknowledged that with the growing number of secular Jews, what was needed was “a search for alternative sources of group solidarity” which were not only connected to the tradition and faith. The report concluded that secularism in Jewish life had to be appreciated and supported as an alternative source of

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<sup>83</sup> Magid 2013, 6, 242.

<sup>84</sup> Magid 2013, 3–4.

identification and that secular Judaism was needed for “the creative engagement of future generations of modern American Jews”.<sup>85</sup>

A Jewish scholar and Rabbi, Dana Evan Kaplan stated in 2005 that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as American Jewry could no longer entrench itself and its culture to the experience of those Jewish generations that immigrated from the Old World to America, it had to “develop strategies to produce indigenous American Jewish experiences”. Kaplan continued that the key issue was to find a reason to maintain a distinct Jewish identity in an open, liberal society.<sup>86</sup> The problem of both maintaining the distinctiveness and appreciating the will to integrate into American culture was expressed for example in a *Contemporary Jewry* article about the degree of integration of young American Jews in 2012 as well.<sup>87</sup>

The challenge was articulated in the Jewish student magazine *New Voices* as well. This is how the chief editor Ilana Sichel put it in 2005: “We face the danger of multiple amnesias: forgetting who we were, who we are, and where we are going.” Her point was that when Jews were no longer under threat but they had become a natural part of American culture, it was difficult to perceive why they should still be seen as a distinct group.<sup>88</sup>

One of Shaul Magid’s main statements seems to be the following: “The Jewish collective in America will survive; it will just look different than before.”<sup>89</sup> Throughout his book *American Post-Judaism*, Magid goes through different aspects in Jewish thought and culture that were in a process of change, such as attitudes towards monotheism and Jesus as a character.

Similar remarks as Magid’s have been made earlier. In their study in 2001, Jewish scholars Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen presented a difficulty that the Jews they had interviewed – who, by that time, were about middle-aged adults – had with their Jewish identity. They wrote that American Jews had a weak connection to Israel and the forms of organizational Judaism like synagogues, and that the fear of anti-Semitism did not have a role in their identity. According to Cohen and Eisen, being a Jew was on one hand a birthright, but on the other hand it was important to be able to choose whether one wanted to be a Jew and in which way. In their view, the challenge that this generation was facing was due to the importance of giving everyone a chance to choose for themselves what they

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<sup>85</sup> Mayer et al 2002, 47.

<sup>86</sup> Kaplan 2005, 76.

<sup>87</sup> Kadushin et al 2012, 168, 183.

<sup>88</sup> Sichel 2005.

<sup>89</sup> Magid 2013, 21.



wanted to believe and not to feel obliged to be a certain kind of Jew. Furthermore, Cohen and Eisen wrote that those American Jews they had researched tended to support an individual choice on how to practice Judaism. The trend was not to be judgmental or have strong views on what was a correct or incorrect way to be a Jew. Even combining Jewish traditions with other non-Jewish or spiritual traditions was often not rejected.<sup>90</sup> These findings are about the Jewishness of the previous generation rather than the one that is the main focus of this study, but if these patterns could be found already among them, it seems likely that they correlate with the younger generation as well and hint at the right direction.

Another remark that Cohen and Eisen made in 2001 was that it seemed by that time that the practice of Judaism was moving towards the private sphere and away from the public domain. This led the “grand narrative” of the Jewish community – the tragic history of oppression and anti-Semitism – to become less meaningful whereas private and family narratives became more important.<sup>91</sup> For the younger generation of Jews, these themes were not as important as they were for the former generations, which perhaps made them less sensitive or special in other ways. Thus, it was not problematic to publicly question or poke fun at them, as the writers in *Heeb* and *New Voices* did to some degree.

Debra Renee Kaufman has also stated that the young Jews of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century often did not consider themes such as the Holocaust, Israel or collective Judaism as key elements of their Jewish identity. Identity for them was a subjective experience, which meant that they could form it of those parts and expressions that they found suitable, without worrying whether it was somehow “authentic”.<sup>92</sup> This quotation from a 27-year-old interviewee in Kaufman’s study from 1999 is telling: “It’s very hard to think that you are part of a chosen people and still feel you are part of all people.”<sup>93</sup> This seems like an understandable question to pose in an open, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Also Sylvia Barack Fishman noted in 2011 that young American Jews were generally against the idea of “us versus them”. According to her, young Jews saw themselves as attached to Jewish ethnicity, but for them it meant embracing Jewish music, food, culture, comedy, religious rituals et cetera. For them, Jewish ethnicity does not

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<sup>90</sup> Cohen & Eisen 2001.

<sup>91</sup> Cohen & Eisen 2001.

<sup>92</sup> Kaufman 2005, 178; Sharot 2011, 165.

<sup>93</sup> Kaufman 2005, 178.

mean creating ethnic boundaries between “us” and “them”. Instead, young Jews feel free to move fluidly between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds.<sup>94</sup>

In the conclusion of their article in *Contemporary Jewry* in 2012, Charles Kadushin and others pondered on the same topic. The article was about the degree of integration of young American Jews into mainstream America. The writers urged for more research and analysis to find solutions to the tension between assimilation and distinctiveness that existed within the American Jewish community. In their words, the American Jewish community should find ways to be simultaneously integrated and distinct, both appreciate the desire for integration and promote connection to the Jewish community.<sup>95</sup> It is easy to understand how this was a difficult theme for young American Jewry. At least in Reform Judaism, however, the idea of Jews as chosen people was more or less dispelled already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>96</sup> and with continued emancipation, it seems reasonable that it was increasingly pushed aside.

It might not have been difficult for all young American Jews, however, to identify with Judaism, although this identification did not mean that they excluded themselves from the others in accordance with the idea of “chosenness”. In a *Commentary* article in 2009, David G. Myers stated that hipster Jews, in other words those Jews who identified with the style of Jewishness that especially *Heeb* represented, did not find it hard to be Jews. They did not alienate themselves from Jewish culture, but adopted only those parts of it that they found compatible with their multiculturalist view. Myers was very critical towards this trend among the young generation of American Jews and saw it only as another attempt to “rewrite Judaism in line with the current fashions”.<sup>97</sup>

One of the patterns that seem to have been common in the religious life of young American Jewry is the idea of Judaism as “an inner thing”. Debra Renee Kaufman discussed this theme in 2005 and cited the work of Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, who had also found the same pattern. Judaism as an inner thing indicates that Judaism or Jewishness is something that does not especially need to be expressed. It is something that exists inside or in one’s mind and there is no need to emphasize it. It does not mean it would not be meaningful or have

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<sup>94</sup> Fishman et al 2011, 160–161, 174.

<sup>95</sup> Kadushin et al 2012, 183.

<sup>96</sup> Cohen & Eisen 2001.

<sup>97</sup> Myers 2009.

significance, just that it is not something that has to be actively expressed.<sup>98</sup> This connects with the trend of gradually accepting an individual understanding of Jewish faith. Also the challenging of monotheism, which Magid proposed, seems to follow a similar trend.

Judaism as an inner thing links with a finding of Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman in their report about single Jewish young adults in 2008. One of the ways in which they found this group of young Jews to express their Jewish engagement was a certain degree of eagerness for personal Jewish growth and empowerment, which could be achieved by oneself, without affiliations with Jewish institutions.<sup>99</sup> Following this, seeing Judaism as an inner thing connects with the fact that young Jewish adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century felt increasingly less obligated to join Jewish organizations or synagogues. Young Jews were not interested in joining programs organized by Jewish organizations only because of general Jewish solidarity. Instead, they tended to join such activities that appealed directly to their own interests, that they found meaningful. The nonestablishment or “countercultural” Jewish organizations were more able to provide these kinds of activities than the establishment.<sup>100</sup> These tendencies could also be seen in the growing proportion of Jews who did not affiliate with any specific denomination. When young Jews did not feel obliged to participate in organized Jewish communal life, also denominational identification did not have such significance for them as it had for previous generations. The tendency of avoiding formal affiliation with Jewish institutions was seen especially in a report about New York Jewry by Cohen et al in 2014.<sup>101</sup>

In 2011, Jack Wertheimer and Steven M. Cohen listed several aspects in which younger generation of American Jews, especially those involved in the nonestablishment sector, differed from the older generation, especially from the established Jewish community. Firstly, as noticed above, young Jewish adults did not feel obliged to support the Jewish community in general. Connected with this, they were not concerned about Jewish future in the same way as older generation, and they did not support so called “protective issues” as much, such as defending against antisemitism or opposing intermarriage in fear of the diminishing of Jewish people in America. Secondly, they did not feel obliged to support Israel as

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<sup>98</sup> Kaufman 2005, 177.

<sup>99</sup> Cohen & Kelman 2008, 17–20.

<sup>100</sup> Wertheimer 2011 a, 12, 24.

<sup>101</sup> Cohen et al 2014, 88–91.

Jews in the same sense as previous generations. Instead, they often criticized Israeli policies, even if they might have still been attached to Israel at the same time. Thirdly – which links with the situation in Israel as well – concerning social justice causes, they did not channel their work for social justice primarily to Jews in need but to all people in need. Despite their differences with previous generations, according to Wertheimer, young American Jews continued “to care about the Jewish people, identify strongly with its culture and history, and express pride in being Jewish.”<sup>102</sup>

To return to Debra Renee Kaufman, she concluded her views on contemporary Jewish identity in 2005 by suggesting that the research should not stick to definitions such as “authentic” and “traditional” or attempt to define whether Jewish identity consists of religious or ethnic aspects. The latter dichotomy limits the possibilities to explain the patterns of Jewish identity and engagement with Judaism. In Kaufman’s view, religion was still an important part of Jewish identity, but not in ways that are perhaps considered as “normal”, or more precisely, authentic and traditional. She saw the expressions of religiosity as a mix of the old and the new.<sup>103</sup> This is where Kaufman’s and Magid’s views meet. Judaism was surviving but it was in a process of change and will look even more different in the future. As an example of the mix of the old and the new, there was a trend of Jewish punk music in the 1990s and early 2000s that was addressed both in *New Voices* and in *Heeb*. These punk bands – such as KOSHER and Yidcore – combined punk music with traditional Hebrew songs and other Jewish classics. *New Voices* published a long article about Jewish punk music in 2004,<sup>104</sup> written by Michael Croland, who wrote a book on the same topic later in 2016. As Alicia Jo Rabins, the fiddler and accordionist of KOSHER, said in the article:

I think KOSHER was part of something bigger than us. — Young American Jews experimenting with different ways the Jewish part of them and the American part of them could interact.<sup>105</sup>

Playing punk music in a Jewish style was one of the ways in which young American Jews could proudly express both their Jewishness and their passion to such a modern phenomenon as punk culture.

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<sup>102</sup> Cohen 2011, 80; Wertheimer 2011 b, 323.

<sup>103</sup> Kaufman 2005, 181–182.

<sup>104</sup> Croland 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Croland 2005.

As can be seen in many studies and other writings, pride is an important aspect to bear in mind when looking at the American Jewish community. American Jews are largely proud of being Jewish. This can be seen in the Pew Research Center survey in 2013 and it was seen in the sources of this study, both *Heeb* and *New Voices*. The survey showed that a total of 94% of adult, American Jews of all ages were proud of being Jewish. The number was as high with the youngest age groups 18–29 (96%) and 30–49 (94%).

When asked how important being Jewish was in one's life, the age group 18–29 answered as follows: Very [important] 33%, Somewhat 44%, and Not too/at all 23%.<sup>106</sup> However, when asked whether the respondents had “a strong sense of belonging to Jewish people”, the numbers were smaller. In the age groups 18–29 and 30–49, the percentage was around 70%.<sup>107</sup>

These statistics – which are, it must be noted, from a few years later than the material examined in this thesis – show how American Jews are largely proud of being Jewish, despite their degree of observance or engagement. This also includes the younger generation. However, this has not always meant that as large a number of Jews would have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people. If “belonging to the Jewish people” can be seen as “engaging with the Jewish community”, the sources of this study, *New Voices* and *Heeb*, support this remark. One of the chief editors of *New Voices*, Daniela Gerson, wrote in 2002:

It is time for us to recreate a Jewish youth culture in which we can take pride in our Jewish heritage and take our place at the Jewish communal table.<sup>108</sup>

Gerson encouraged the young Jewish readers of the magazine to be proud of their Jewishness, but at the same time she indicated that it was not easy for young Jews to find their place in the “established” Jewish community, especially when the young had new viewpoints or disagreed with previous generations.<sup>109</sup>

In the next two sub-chapters I will present the image of American Jewishness that my two main sources – the magazines *Heeb* and *New Voices* – give. Before doing this, it feels meaningful to point out that even if merely two magazines cannot represent the whole variety of the Jewishness of young American Jews, their contexts are valid for the majority of American Jews. According to the Pew Research Center in 2013, 58% of American Jews were college graduates and in addition, 25% had some studies in college. Only 4% of

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<sup>106</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 51–52.

<sup>107</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 52.

<sup>108</sup> Gerson 2002 b.

<sup>109</sup> Gerson 2002 b.

all American Jews lived in rural areas, whereas 49% lived in urban areas and 47% in the suburbs. A total of 43% of American Jews in 2013 lived in the northeastern part of the United States.<sup>110</sup> Comparing with these data, Jewish college students and urban young Jews, mainly in New York, represent a significant proportion of – if surely not all – young American Jews. The focus on New York Jews can also be justified with what Cohen et al stated in their report about New York Jewry in 2014, that as the scale of the New York Jewish community is so large, “—the future of American Jewry – indeed of Diaspora Jewry – is powerfully influenced by developments in the New York area.”<sup>111</sup>

## **2. “Nuggets of Sarcasm” – Jewishness in Heeb**

In 2001, Jennifer Bleyer, a Jewish 25-year-old Columbia University graduate and freelance writer, decided that she would found a magazine about cool Jews. In her social circles in Brooklyn in New York there seemed to be a considerable amount of hip, cool Jews – in other words, Jewish hipsters. She found several friends, also in their twenties, to join her in the editorial board, even though the first issue was published with grants and none of the editors were paid. All of the editors identified with Judaism, even if they were not involved in the Jewish community. Still, the funders of the new magazine saw that the editors represented many facets of how young American Jews viewed themselves.<sup>112</sup> However, Bleyer firmly stated that the mission of *Heeb* was not to engage young Jews more strongly to Judaism,<sup>113</sup> even if this might have been the secret wish of the funders. It seems clear that the Jewish community tended to fund those projects or causes which focused on engaging young Jews with the Jewish community. This was seen for example in a personal text<sup>114</sup> by an editor of *New Voices*, Melissa Harvis Renny.

From the very beginning, the aim of the magazine was that everything in the magazine was connected to Jews, but it should not be for a Jewish audience only. “We’re trying to be as inclusive of everything as we can”, Bleyer stated in *Observer* in July 2001. Bleyer also said that being politically left was part of her Jewish identity.<sup>115</sup> Liberal and left-leaning political views were usual among all American Jewry, even more so among the younger generation. In 2013, 75% of

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<sup>110</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 46, 111.

<sup>111</sup> Cohen et al 2014, 138–39.

<sup>112</sup> Snyder 2001.

<sup>113</sup> Snyder 2001.

<sup>114</sup> Harvis Renny 2004.

<sup>115</sup> Snyder 2001.

the Jews aged 18–29 identified with the Democratic party or leaned towards it, 54% considered themselves politically liberal and 28% politically moderate.<sup>116</sup> Numbers were even higher among Jews with a post-graduate degree, which is the group that most of the editors of *Heeb* seemed to belong to. Picking a provocative name like *Heeb* – which originates from an ethnic slur that comes from the word *Hebrew* – and being politically progressive were surely inclusive choices towards non-Jewish, urban young adults, but they probably excluded more conservative Jews from the magazine’s audience.

The beginnings of *Heeb*, as presented in the *Observer* article,<sup>117</sup> show several trends among young Jews in New York. The trend that could be called “hipsterism” was embraced by these urban Jews, perhaps proportionally even more than among non-Jews. The first editorial board of *Heeb* consisted of young Jews who were not actively involved in the Jewish community, but who were still openly and proudly Jewish. They were inclusive and wanted to be open towards cultural trends outside the Jewish sphere.

Also Professor Laurence Roth from Susquehanna University has noticed *Heeb*’s openness towards non-Jewish cultural trends. According to him, *Heeb* helped the young, urban Jewry “to situate itself within the wider currents of American society and culture”. Roth also explained that *Heeb* was highly influenced by the “zine” culture in the 1990s, which was a sub-culture around small, independently produced and photocopied publications that addressed popular phenomena, also known as “fanzines” or “fan magazines”. According to Roth, there were two Jewish magazines published in this scene in the 1990s, *Plotz* and the Jewish punk magazine *Mazel-tov Cocktail*, which was actually published by Jennifer Bleyer, the founder of *Heeb*. Roth argues that *Plotz* was a representative of a trend that could be called “alt-Jewishness”, which significantly affected the style of *Heeb* later.<sup>118</sup>

After the publication of several issues, Jennifer Bleyer left *Heeb* in 2003. She was followed by Joshua Neuman, who was in charge of the magazine from 2004 to 2010. When *Heeb* published a Hollywood Issue in 2008, the Los Angeles-based *Jewish Journal* published an article about the magazine and its publisher Neuman. In the article, the urban-centeredness of *Heeb* became clear:

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<sup>116</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 97.

<sup>117</sup> Snyder 2001.

<sup>118</sup> Roth 2007, 99–102.

For Josh Neuman, publisher of *Heeb* magazine, there are two cities in America: New York and Los Angeles – and “all that s--- in the middle,” which he's just not interested in.<sup>119</sup>

The connection between trendy Jewishness and an urban standpoint and attitude is not unexpected. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, New York City and Los Angeles had the largest concentrations of Jews in their twenties and thirties, and also a significant amount of nonestablishment Jewish activity, such as *Heeb*.<sup>120</sup> According to the Pew Research Center, 49% of American Jews lived in urban areas and 47% in the suburbs in 2013. Only the remaining 4% lived in rural areas. A total of 43% of American Jews in 2013 lived in the northeastern part of the United States; 23% in the South, 23% in the West and only 11% in the Midwest.<sup>121</sup> It seems that especially New York in the Northeast was considered a very Jewish city. A Chinese-American author Gish Jen said in an interview in *New Voices* in 2002: “– I think everyone who lives in New York is a little Jewish. It’s part of what it means to be a New Yorker today.”<sup>122</sup> Los Angeles had the second biggest Jewish community in the United States, with around half a million Jewish residents, in 2011, and was thus an “important player” in the American Jewish community.<sup>123</sup>

According to the *Observer* article mentioned before,<sup>124</sup> the group that founded *Heeb* could be considered hipsters, and later on in *Jewish Journal*, *Heeb* was referred as “the unofficial authority for hipster Jews”.<sup>125</sup> Also David G. Myers in *Commentary* saw *Heeb* as the *primus motor* of this “hipster Judaism” movement, which he obviously despised.<sup>126</sup> The hipster trend could be seen in several articles in *Heeb*. For example, in 2007 in an interview with the actor Zach Galifianakis – known for his beard – it was pointed out that “beards have replaced moustaches in the hipster uniform”.<sup>127</sup> In 2004, “jessie” wrote about her secret habit of listening to Billy Joel and said that Joel will never be approved by *hipsterati* like several other old, famous artists were.<sup>128</sup> The term *hipsterati* seems to be an ironic way of referring to the hipster community. In 2007, the editors ironized their own looks in an announcement about the launch party of the

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<sup>119</sup> Berrin 2008.

<sup>120</sup> Wertheimer 2011 a, 33.

<sup>121</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 46.

<sup>122</sup> Letzler 2002. Same attitude could be seen for example in the *Heeb* blog entry about Gwyneth Paltrow (Yid Vicious 2007 a).

<sup>123</sup> Benor 2011, 119.

<sup>124</sup> Snyder 2001.

<sup>125</sup> Berkma 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>127</sup> jessie 2007 c.

<sup>128</sup> jessie 2004 b.



website *heeb100.com*, in which *Heeb* promoted 100 young and influential Jews. Instead of looking for pricy fancy dresses, they stated for their readers that “all you need is a pair of black-rimmed glasses to fit right in”.<sup>129</sup> According to a stereotype, a hipsters’ outfit included wearing large, black-rimmed glasses.<sup>130</sup> *Heeb* also acknowledged the fact that *keffiyehs* – the scarves that had become a symbolic garment for Palestinians – had become popular among hipsters. The article explained the complicated background of the scarf and the feelings it evoked in both Jews and Arabs in New York. Both sides seemed to consider the popularity of *keffiyehs* troubling.<sup>131</sup> All in all, these examples show how *Heeb* was participating in the surrounding trends in New York and how the style of being Jewish that *Heeb* promoted was inspired by other things hip by that time. As an aware Jewish magazine, it also understood and explained such controversial trends as the *keffiyehs* that occurred during the time. These aspects indicate that the editors of *Heeb* were highly integrated in the surrounding culture.

As Jennifer Bleyer stated in 2001 that *Heeb* should be as inclusive as possible, the following years showed that it indeed did not want to exclude itself from other trendy people or other minorities in New York. As an example, the editors of *Heeb* played baseball games with the writers’ organization Paragraph and the magazine *High Times*.<sup>132</sup> *Heeb* also published a blog text in 2007 about a new website *www.gamejew.com*, which was launched by the 25-years-old Jonathan Mann, who wanted to promote the acceptance of gamer culture with the site.<sup>133</sup> When the editors of *Heeb* were looking for interns, they concluded the text by stating: “And no, you don’t have to be Jewish. We accept slave labor from all races and creeds.”<sup>134</sup> Even if the editors wanted *Heeb* to concentrate on topics around Judaism and Jewishness, they were interested in other topics as well, although they usually tried to keep the Jewish point of view while doing it. The magazine featured articles about Arab-Americans<sup>135</sup> and African American culture.<sup>136</sup> *Heeb* also titled its 15<sup>th</sup> issue the Goy Issue in which they concentrated on themes around non-Jews and interviewees were not all Jewish. Neither was

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<sup>129</sup> joshua neuman 2007 c.

<sup>130</sup> More on typical hipster outfit, see Alfrey 2010, 31–33.

<sup>131</sup> rebecca 2007 a.

<sup>132</sup> rebecca 2007 b; jessie 2007 d.

<sup>133</sup> Abrams 2007.

<sup>134</sup> rebecca 2007 c.

<sup>135</sup> rebecca 2007 a.

<sup>136</sup> For example interviews with a comedian, writer Paul Mooney (jessie 2007 e) and Cornel West (Ratzman 2004).

*Heeb* exclusively a New York magazine, at least so in 2007 when it organized successful parties in several cities around the United States.<sup>137</sup> Considering that Bleyer's statement that *Heeb* was mirroring what was going on within the young and urban Jewish circles, at least these young Jews did not want to cut themselves off from the surrounding urban culture. They wanted to be aware of the issues of other minorities and participate in popular activities, such as gaming, as Jews. Steven M. Cohen stated in 2011 that young nonestablishment leaders – into which the editors of “new Jewish media”, such as *Heeb*, would be included – were more integrated than older establishment leaders.<sup>138</sup> They did not want to segregate as Jews, but to integrate as Jews, to be part of the community and still embrace certain aspects of Jewishness.

According to Joshua Neuman, *Heeb* was always about making Jewish fun.<sup>139</sup> The writers of the magazine were self-assertive about this. In a blog text in 2007, “rebecca” for example called the *Heeb* texts “nuggets of sarcasm”.<sup>140</sup> Irony and sarcasm were usually connected with the hipster trend. A significant number of those Jewish celebrities that *Heeb* interviewed or wrote about were comedians, such as Joan Rivers, Jon Stewart, Bob Saget, Sarah Silverman and Rain Pryor.<sup>141</sup> In 2007, the magazine stated that it was a place for all kinds of humor.<sup>142</sup> However, in the same text, they dissociated from being purposefully “iconoclastic” or shocking. This was their statement:

*Heeb* story should not be iconoclastic for the sake of iconoclasm. We don't believe that shock value is inherently interesting or worthwhile. If you're challenging a sacred cow, you should have a motive besides wanting to hear it 'moo'.<sup>143</sup>

However, *Heeb* was also criticized for being controversial and indeed iconoclastic. In the Germany Issue in 2009, the cover picture featured a Jewish grandmother and comedian Roseann Barr playing Hitler with the moustache and a swastika armband, baking burnt human-form cookies. The idea of it was, according to both Barr and Joshua Neuman, to perform a satire of Hitler and laugh at him and his ideas, not at the Holocaust victims, but the deep level of the humor was not seen by most of the viewers. Instead, they saw the pictures as shocking and not funny.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that the sincere agenda of Barr and *Heeb*

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<sup>137</sup> The Grand Conspirator 2007 a; joshua neuman 2007 e.

<sup>138</sup> Cohen 2011, 61–62.

<sup>139</sup> joshua neuman 2010.

<sup>140</sup> rebecca 2007 c.

<sup>141</sup> jessie 2004 d, jessie 2005 b, rebecca 2007 e, *Heeb* 2007 b, Ruttenberg 2007.

<sup>142</sup> joshua neuman 2007 d.

<sup>143</sup> joshua neuman 2007 d.

<sup>144</sup> Berrin 2009.

staff was to make intelligent humor and raise discussion, and not only to shock, even if this mission did not work out. This case perhaps shows that there was a trend of testing in what ways it was allowed to address this kind of themes – especially the Holocaust – and how to make jokes about them. The Holocaust played a part in some humorous, but milder and less controversial texts that are found in *Heeb* web archives.<sup>145</sup> They also published a slightly disapproving article in 2003 about David Deutsch, a stand-up comedian whose routine consisted of Holocaust-related jokes. In the text they called Deutsch “the world’s worst Jewish comedian”,<sup>146</sup> even though Deutsch was later appointed the humor editor of *Heeb*. It seems that *Heeb* was well aware how significant and sensitive an issue the Holocaust was for the Jewish community in the United States. Their style of addressing the issue was just find the humor in it – sometimes more successfully and sometimes less – and for example to satirize Hitler as a character, instead of fostering the memory devoutly. This was their way to tackle the complex issue.

Making fun of stereotypes was another source of humor in *Heeb*. In the third issue, there was an article about the beauty of Jewish women, which played with the stereotype that Jews have big noses. The writer “jessie”, who most likely is Jessie Bodzin, used phrases like “follow my nose” and “shapely shnozzen”<sup>147</sup> and finished with confident lines:

All respect to the mainstream beauties of the world, but we’ve got the fever for another flavor. So move over, bacon, ‘cuz we’re too much of a good thing.<sup>148</sup>

Using the word “bacon” in this context, referring to non-Jewish women, is clearly a deliberate choice. It winks at a reader who knows that Jews who keep kosher are prohibited from eating pork. The stereotype about “Jewish noses” was also exploited in a blog text about “two of our favorite Jewesses”, Sarah Jessica Parker and Amy Winehouse, both of whom the *Maxim* magazine had named “the world’s most unsexiest women”.<sup>149</sup> Bringing up the stereotype about noses expresses the confidence of the group that identifies with *Heeb*’s style of presenting Jewishness. The stereotypes do not need to be taken seriously. Instead, they can even become sources of self-confidence.

Other stereotypes were also addressed. In an article *Merchants of Menace* in the Money Issue in 2006, *Heeb* came up with a list of short biographies of nasty

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<sup>145</sup> Heeb 2007 a; jessie 2007 f.

<sup>146</sup> jessie 2003 b.

<sup>147</sup> A slang word for a nose.

<sup>148</sup> jessie 2003a.

<sup>149</sup> Malka 2007.

Jewish merchants. The statement of the article was that not all Jews are greedy and rich, but the list was presented with a foreword: “as the far-from-exhaustive list below suggests, there are certainly no shortage of Jews who are out there working overtime to make sure the stereotype applies to us all.”<sup>150</sup> As another example, Jews are sometimes considered “self-hating”. This assumption was tackled by *Heeb* in the Love Issue in 2007 by publishing a list of Jews from past and present – including for example Karl Marx, a KISS-member Gene Simmons and a Jewish rapper Jewda Maccabi – that the editors “absolutely love to hate”. The text stated that the *Heeb* staff was very fond of themselves, but not all of their “fellow tribesmen and women”.<sup>151</sup> In this way, the concept of self-deprecation was ironically changed to mean hating other Jews but not oneself.

The fact that *Heeb* came up with their own section called *Urban Kvetch*, which was made up of all kinds of brief complaints that the editors and readers had, already indicates that they considered, perhaps ironically, that complaining was a significant part of being a Jew. This stereotype of a *kvetching* Jew was strengthened in *Urban Kvetch* texts, such as the one in which Jaime Wolf complained about dying of the adverb (such as the phrase “think different”) and another in which Michael Moshan complained how everyone assumed that he understood every reference to Seinfeld just because he was a Jewish New Yorker.<sup>152</sup> The art of *kvetching* was cherished also in several other *Heeb* articles.<sup>153</sup>

The aim of *Heeb* was to not care about stereotypes but instead to laugh together at them and poke fun at them. They did not deny all of it, but made funny and informative articles about it. For example, they said that not all Jews are greedy and rich but many seem to have been, and then they informed their readers through these funny biographies who these people were. Then they especially enjoyed and cherished complaining (*kvetching*) as a typical Jewish activity, even if that could be seen as a stereotype as well.

Open-minded and unorthodox ways of being a Jew got plenty coverage in the pages of *Heeb*. In addition to presenting both known and unknown Jews with various views, the magazine for example published several collections of

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<sup>150</sup> Heeb 2006.

<sup>151</sup> Liz 2009 a (2007).

<sup>152</sup> Heeb 2010 a (2007); Heeb 2010 b (2007).

<sup>153</sup> E.g. Yid Vicious 2007 a; rebecca 2007 d.

“Horascopes”, horoscopes with a “Jewish twist”.<sup>154</sup> However, as mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, Cohen and Eisen stated in their study already in 2001 that there was a tendency among American Jews to not be judgmental of other Jews’ religious views or practices. This included a certain degree of acceptance even towards combining Jewish traditions with other non-Jewish or spiritual traditions. However, as Cohen and Eisen pointed out, this and other generalizations did not apply to all of their interviewees, for example those with the higher levels of activity and involvement in Jewish practices.<sup>155</sup> It seems that *Heeb* indeed represented the views of the more liberal part of Jews in America. Most likely these kinds of new trends did not apply to the more traditional Orthodox Jews and probably not to some Conservative Jews either. It would seem reasonable to see this openness as a trend within the more liberal denominations and those who did not affiliate with any specific denomination.

There was not many articles in *Heeb* that would have been directly informative about the ways of being a young Jew. Still, there were some interesting examples. In an article in 2007, an unknown author<sup>156</sup> recalled her confirmation class for high school students led by Rabbi Sirkman. The writer told how Sirkman made them discuss Israel, politics, Jewish philosophers and other challenging material. Rabbi’s mission was to help young people to “identify their place in the world” and to see Judaism as “a course of open dialogue”.<sup>157</sup> The article indicates that at least some young Jews were encouraged to think for themselves and form their own opinions and ways of being Jewish.

An assumption by at least one of the contributors of *Heeb*, Elliot Ratzman, can be found in an interview he did with Larry Kramer in 2004, where Ratzman himself said: “I think a lot of Jews don’t believe in God, but believe in Judaism.”<sup>158</sup> With this phrase he was perhaps trying to describe the way in which Jews he knew did not consider themselves religious but enjoyed being part of Jewish tradition and saw it as important. Another hint of the general opinion among these urban Jews can be found in an *Urban Kvetch* by Rachel Feinstein, where the trend of saying “I’m not religious, but I’m spiritual” was ridiculed.<sup>159</sup> When analyzing this, the usual, humorous style of writing in the *Urban Kvetches*

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<sup>154</sup> jessie 2007 i; jessie 2005 c.

<sup>155</sup> Cohen & Eisen 2001.

<sup>156</sup> The text is again credited to “jessie” but she is probably not the writer.

<sup>157</sup> jessie 2007 g.

<sup>158</sup> Ratzman 2014 (2004).

<sup>159</sup> Heeb 2010 c (2005).

has to be taken into account, which means that it probably cannot be seen as directly presenting views of the editors or the readers. It could still be assumed that the statement Feinstein presented would not be funny if it was not at least partly true.

In 2004, *Heeb* presented two young Jewish athletes and their views about being Jewish. In the article, Allen Salkin interviewed two young National Football League players, Gabe Kapler, 28, and Mike Seidman, 22. Kapler, who had tattoos with Jewish themes like the Star of David and a text “Never Again, 1933–1945”, explained that he had always been in favor of strong and powerful Jewish role models. In his view, the stereotypical image of a weak but clever and educated Jew was often too emphasized and did not give space for young Jews to develop themselves into the direction they found their own. When Mike Seidman was asked about his status as “a Jewish sports hero”, he answered casually: “If it makes people happy, then good for me, I guess.” He also told that his girlfriend was half-Arab – which some people had found troubling as their view was that Arabs did not get along well with Jews – but continued: “I met her dad. He’s cool.”<sup>160</sup> That article, titled “Where Have You Gone, Sandy Koufax?” – referring to a famous Jewish baseball player in the 1960s who refused to pitch on the Jewish holy day Yom Kippur – concentrated on the editors of *Jewish Sports Review (JSR)*. The main activity of these men in their sixties was to find out which American athletes were Jewish, put their names on The Jewish Sports Hall of Fame – whether the athletes wanted it or not – and to inform the readers “how Jewish” these athletes were. This meant that they marked whether they had a Jewish father (P), Jewish mother (M), were converts (C) or “fully” Jewish.<sup>161</sup> The tone of the article indicated that *Heeb* enjoyed publishing the thoughts of these young athletes, but disapproved the activity of *JSR*, for example by mocking their marking system in subtle ways several times in the article.

Another interesting individual and a young Jew that *Heeb* presented was Sarah Black, 23 years old by 2007, who had performed the duty of a *Shabbos goy* with her Jewish friends in the Brandeis University, which is a Jewish institution. *Shabbos goy* is a term for a non-Jew who performs tasks for Orthodox or Conservative Jews who are not allowed to perform them by themselves on Sabbath, such as turning the lights on. In this role, Black’s situation was

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<sup>160</sup> Liz 2004. (Credited to Liz, but written by Allen Salkin.)

<sup>161</sup> Liz 2004.

complicated. She was clearly with the group, but still always an outsider, even if her father was a full-blooded, although non-observant Jew, which for Reform Jews would be enough to call her a Jew as well. These experiences had led her to decide that after her graduation she was going to go through a full conversion, which is a long and difficult process.<sup>162</sup> Black is an unusual case to be seen in the pages of *Heeb*: a young Jew who wants to convert to be a part of the conservative branch of Judaism, even if she would be considered a Jew in other branches. Nevertheless, her case is an example how some young Jews found also more observant ways of Judaism appealing.

More than presenting “ordinary” young Jews, *Heeb* featured interviews with famous Jewish music artists and actors whose engagement with Judaism and thoughts about it varied. *Heeb* usually asked everyone about their Jewishness, and over time, the interviewees began to expect it, as can be seen in the interview with an artist and gallery-owner Zach Feuer. When the interviewer asked something about Judaism, Feuer began by saying: “Hmmm, I need a *Heeb* answer for this.”<sup>163</sup>

Perry Farrell from the rock band Jane’s Addiction was interviewed in *Heeb* in 2003. He had been more radical earlier but had later embraced an easy and natural attitude towards his Jewishness and Jewish faith. In the introduction of the article, it was said that after his active years in the band, Farrell had become “somewhat of a born-again Jew”. The themes addressed in the article emphasized this. Farrell seems sincere when he explained how the Torah was the most inspiring text for him, how we were close to Messianic times and how Jews had their own cosmic slot in the world as the group that had been tormented but which stayed firm and loyal. He also explained that he used to try other spiritualities when he was young but did not do it any longer. However, at the end of the interview Farrell said that he felt that God had put him into the world to entertain others and to be “a sexy motherfucker”.<sup>164</sup> Farrell is pictured as a sincerely believing Jew, which was perhaps unusual to see in the pages of *Heeb*, but surely the end of the interview gave him some edge as a famous Jew.

Another case like Perry Farrell was an interview with the actor and singer Corey Feldman, who said that he prayed every day for “the good of all beings, including animals”. His description of his prayers feels casual:

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<sup>162</sup> jessie 2007 h.

<sup>163</sup> david 2007.

<sup>164</sup> jessie 2003 a.

I feel like when I pray to God there's this world receptor radio and he's listening to all these different stations. – I'm trying to tap in, like, 'Hello? Can you hear me?'<sup>165</sup>

In addition to Farrell and Feldman, *Heeb* presented or interviewed many more Jewish musicians, such as the daring singer and performer Peaches,<sup>166</sup> Hasidic reggae star Matisyahu<sup>167</sup> and a seemingly bizarre hip-hop group called Team Facelift, which included a strange character called Fat Jew.<sup>168</sup> The fact that Team Facelift received glory in the pages of *Heeb* and its significance was compared to the truly successful Matisyahu and the distinguished writer Jonathan Safran Foer, reveals that the magazine wanted to promote these kinds of unusual manifestations of Jewish culture. Nevertheless, music seems to have been one of the tools that young Jews used to build their identity. In 2007, Wendla Nölle made a film called *The Chosen Ones* where she interviewed young and old Jewish musicians about the connections between their music and their Jewish identities.<sup>169</sup> The thoughts of these musicians might have been reflected in their fans and the readers of *Heeb* as well.

In 2002, *Heeb* featured an interview with Israeli Jewish Shai Shazar, a former gigolo. In the interview, he and the interviewer discussed his career and, briefly, his thoughts about Jewishness. Shazar explained about the “internal rabbi” whom he had in his head and who he thought took care of him. When asking more about this rabbi, Shazar, after looking his life in a retrospect, came to the conclusion that the rabbi must have been “highly-unorthodox”. The interview closed with the question whether Shazar thought that his former profession would be a good choice for a nice Jewish boy, and he agreed it would.<sup>170</sup> The interview seems to support the image of the magazine's style and views. It presented in a positive light an unusual way of being Jewish: working as a gigolo and embracing an idea of an “internal rabbi” in one's mind.

All in all, *Heeb* seems to have presented an individualistic idea that everyone can be Jewish exactly in the way they want. The magazine emphasized this idea by interviewing Jewish people who were somehow unusual or radical in what they had done and perhaps become famous for. Through this, the magazine perhaps helped young Jews to express their Jewishness in ways that fit with the other aspects of their lives. As the other articles written about *Heeb* hinted, and as

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<sup>165</sup> Liz 2005.

<sup>166</sup> Neuman 2002.

<sup>167</sup> jessie 2004 a.

<sup>168</sup> Yid Vicious 2007 b.

<sup>169</sup> Heeb 2007 c.

<sup>170</sup> jessie 2010 (2002).



can be seen in the selection of *Heeb* articles referred to in this chapter as well, *Heeb* enabled its urban, skeptical Jewish readership to – in the words of Laurence Roth – “situate itself within the wider currents of American society and culture”. After its first publication, *Heeb* received feedback such as: “It is a pleasure to find a publication that can help me feel proud of my heritage” and “*Heeb* really is a cool magazine”.<sup>171</sup> This also connects with the *Heeb*’s status as “an unofficial authority for hipster Jews”. These statements suggest that *Heeb* did have significance and its daring but fun style influenced the culture of young American Jews.

Laurence Roth analyzed the first issues of the magazine in his article about oppositional Jewish culture in the academic journal *Shofar* in 2007. According to him, *Heeb* had a “high irony content” and the topics it covered, varying from Yiddish rap artists to peace in the Middle East, created “seemingly daring yet absurd cultural and narrative juxtapositions”, which were usual in the “zines”, especially *Plotz*, one of the only Jewish zines in the 1990s. Roth noted that *Heeb* reflected Jewish pride and poked fun at Jewish characteristics at the same time.<sup>172</sup> This can be seen in the articles presented in this study as well, such as the one with the biblical scenes involving sex<sup>173</sup> or the one about the stereotypically “Jewish” noses of Sarah Jessica Parker and Amy Winehouse.

Roth also considers that *Heeb* created a “new Jew” brand. The brand, or perhaps more a trend, was noted for example at CNN in 2009 as well.<sup>174</sup> This brand was more or less built on “alt-Jewishness”, which acquired – according to Roth – “cultural legitimacy and social prestige” through *Heeb*’s writings and *Heeb* merchandise, like “Honorary Heeb” t-shirts. This status that alt-Jewishness achieved created acceptance and admiration for this form of a Jewish identity; in other words, it could be said, it made Jewishness cool. The brand also seemed helpful for the established Jewish community, which tried to come into better contact with young Jewry through it and for example spurred them to date and marry Jews. On the other hand, as mentioned already, the brand helped this young generation of Jews to situate themselves within American culture and society.<sup>175</sup> As noted later in the sub-chapter about intermarriage, *New Voices* met with more pressure than *Heeb* to engage young Jews into the Jewish community and to speak

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<sup>171</sup> Roth 2007, 101, 119.

<sup>172</sup> Roth 2007, 118, 120.

<sup>173</sup> jessie 2005 a. See chapter 4.2. “Sexuality and gender”.

<sup>174</sup> Ravitz 2009. See chapter 5.1. “Cool Jewishness and hipster Judaism”.

<sup>175</sup> Roth 2007, 120–122.

for dating and marrying Jews. The editors of *Heeb* announced already in one of their first interviews that they did not have such mission. Jennifer Bleyer said in 2001:

We're not out there, like, proselytizing. We're certainly not trying to tell people to marry other Jews or go back to synagogue or whatever, you know—<sup>176</sup>

However, as the feedback *Heeb* received suggests, they did manage to help some young Jews to “find their Jewishness again”, in a way. They gave a new way for young Jews to express Jewishness in the sphere where *Heeb* was created, the hipster culture of New York. It could be said that *Heeb* created hipster Jews by enabling this group of young Jews to express their Jewishness within hipsterism and other urban culture.

Coming up with a historical point of view, Roth concludes his article by stating that “every generation, after all, finds its own voice and look, its own way of making Jewish ‘cool’”.<sup>177</sup> Also David Myers’ view in his critical article towards hipster Judaism was that these “new Jews” did not understand that they were only repeating what previous generations had done before.<sup>178</sup> An obvious example of this is the generation that grew up in the 1960s. Already they criticized their parents’ generation’s way of life. They also had their own Jewish celebrities, such as Barbra Streisand and the comedian Lenny Bruce. According to the few sources in this study that address Jewish culture in the 1960s, some similarities could be seen in the ways in which the two generations rebelled against previous ones, such as popular culture as a forum for it. However, American culture at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was obviously very different compared with the 1960s, so the context and means of the Millennials were different. Both generations reacted and somewhat adapted to the surrounding culture, but for example multiculturalism and the effect of the internet made the Millennials’ situation perhaps more complex.

### **3. “News and Views of Campus Jews” – Jewishness in New Voices**

In accordance with the motto of the magazine, “News and views of campus Jews”, the *New Voices* material for this study, from 2002 to 2007, gives a wide and versatile picture of the Judaism and Jewishness of young American Jews and the themes that were essential and current during that time. Israel was obviously a

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<sup>176</sup> Snyder 2001.

<sup>177</sup> Roth 2007, 123.

<sup>178</sup> Myers 2009.

highly topical issue, after the failed peace negotiations and during the second *intifada* 2000–2005. This linked more widely to the political views of young Jews and also to their Jewish identity. In addition to this, the magazine covered social dimensions of young Jews, such as intermarriage (marrying outside faith) and ethical views. These topics are covered in the following chapters, which include material from the *Heeb* magazine as well. In this sub-chapter, I concentrate mainly on two kinds of texts. Firstly, I will deal with the texts with discussion about the place of young Jews within the American Jewish community, which was mainly kept up by the editorial board of *New Voices*. This theme links with intermarriage, which I will look at more closely in the fourth chapter. Secondly, I will look at those texts in which young Jews write about their own Jewishness and thoughts about Judaism in general.

I will begin by observing what the editors of *New Voices* wrote about the attempts of preserving Jewish heritage in America, and then continue to trace other writers' views and experiences. The theme came up frequently through the time frame of this study. In 2002, Daniela Gerson urged the readership of *New Voices* – young Jews, that is – to raise their voice and “recreate a Jewish youth culture” in which they could take pride in their Jewish heritage in order to take their place in the Jewish community. In Gerson's opinion, the Jewish community did not speak for young Jews, so there was a need for them to speak in their “own diverse voices”.<sup>179</sup> Gerson's views reflect tendencies that could be seen already in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many American Jews felt that Jewish organizations expected much and gave little in return. In other words, the established Jewish community demanded engagement but was not able to offer things that this generation would have wanted.<sup>180</sup>

Some of the most direct opinions in *New Voices* about the young Jews' pressure of preserving Jewish heritage were found in the “Editor's View” articles by Melissa Harvis Renny, who worked as the chief editor of *New Voices* between 2002–2004. She criticized with a sharp tone the public attitude that the Jewish community had towards young Jews. The main point of Harvis Renny's text in October 2003 seems to be that when young American Jews were losing connection with the Jewish community, it was a crisis only because the Jewish community had made it a crisis. In the Jewish community's viewpoint, the Jewish

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<sup>179</sup> Gerson 2002 b.

<sup>180</sup> Wertheimer 2011 a, 2.

culture of young Jews, which was often mixed with other culture, was not worthy by itself but only a tool to “real engagement”. She concluded her text with direct demands: “Stop trying to ‘sell’ Judaism to the next generation of Jews – we’re creators, not consumers.”<sup>181</sup>

Harvis Renny continued with the same theme in May 2004 when she wrote about how to gain funding for *New Voices*. The text was written in an ironic tone in the form of a discussion between herself and her *dybbuk*,<sup>182</sup> who was counseling Harvis Renny in her job as an editor of *New Voices*. Their debate included an observation that to gain funding from the organized Jewish community, *New Voices* was “too left-wing and definitely not pro-Israel enough”. The magic words to use in discussions with potential funders were continuity, which meant more Jewish babies, and engagement, which meant displaying Jewish heritage. Harvis Renny stated through the words of her *dybbuk*: “Jewish institutions won’t see any point in *New Voices* unless we function as an engagement tool”. In the conclusion of the text, Harvis Renny again posed open criticism against this idea by saying that there was nothing wrong with Jewish babies but “—being Jewish can’t just be about making sure there are more Jews”.<sup>183</sup>

In addition to Harvis Renny and Gerson, Josh Nathan-Kazis, who worked as an editor of *New Voices* in 2007–2009, wrote in 2007 about the Jewish press: “[The mainstream Jewish press] has two messages for young Jews: first, support Israel, and second, marry a Jew.”<sup>184</sup> He continued that this stance that the Jewish establishment had, seeing young Jews only as statistics and instruments of continuity, had chased the young Jews away from the discussion. Nathan-Kazis stated that *New Voices* wanted to represent young Jews of all backgrounds and with any views. To be able to do this, he asked the readers to write them once in a while.<sup>185</sup>

These views of the editors might give an embroidered picture of what the magazine actually meant to Jewish college students. It is of course possible that their Jewish student readership did not widely agree with the editors. However, some of the letters to the editor indicate that the views of the editors were appreciated. As an example, Ronch Willner from Australia and Joshua Einstein

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<sup>181</sup> Harvis Renny 2003.

<sup>182</sup> *Dybbuk* in Jewish folklore is a kind of ghost or spirit that possesses a human body.

<sup>183</sup> Harvis Renny 2004.

<sup>184</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2007 a.

<sup>185</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2007 a.

from Hoboken, New Jersey wrote to *New Voices* in 2008 to give feedback about the November / December 2007 issue. Willner complimented *New Voices* on the good work they did and said there was nothing like that in Australia. Einstein told the magazine that most of the time he disagreed with the views presented in *New Voices*, but the Nathan-Kazis article *My Enemies List* about the position of Jewish students in the Jewish community was “spot on”. Einstein continued by praising the style of *New Voices*:

*New Voices* provides a unique world view, critical of the establishment while keeping an eye on unique Jewish developments.<sup>186</sup>

These kinds of responses indicate that when the editors of *New Voices* took a stand on issues and expressed sometimes strong opinions, there were readers who agreed with them and appreciated their work.

Some of the editors’ texts also linked with the “unique challenge”, presented at the beginning of this second chapter. One text by Melissa Harvis Renny had a viewpoint that it is the feeling of safety that has led the Jewish community to worry so much about the survival of Judaism in the United States. This resonates with the idea that the feeling of threat or fear has always been a factor that has drawn the Jewish community together and made it stronger. Harvis Renny continued that whereas Jews in Israel were continuously scared of losing their lives in bombings, American Jews in their safe haven came up with new threats such as the rising rates of intermarriage.<sup>187</sup> Another writer in *New Voices*, Ilana Sichel, saw that when Jews were no longer under threat, and they had become a natural part of American culture, it was difficult to understand what still distinguished them as their own group.<sup>188</sup>

Eric Trager, who labeled himself as a secular Jew, pondered the same issue in *New Voices* in 2006. He felt that as the Jewish identity of secular Jews was not built on religion, much of its basis was in the past. Oppression against Jews had made the Jewish community a tight group in the past, but when such oppression had – fortunately, one would think – not happened in the United States for a long time, secular Jewish identity did not have much to build on any longer. When the past and the tragic memories fade further out of living memory, Trager wrote, the “Jewish” label is going to lose its significance in the future.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2008.

<sup>187</sup> Harvis Renny 2003.

<sup>188</sup> Sichel 2005.

<sup>189</sup> Trager 2006.

These examples show that historical consciousness could be seen in the texts of *New Voices*. The writers understood the significance that the tragic history of Jewish people had for previous generations, but questioned whether it should still have as much meaning for their own generation. In most cases, they seem to have felt that it did not need to have such a significance for them any longer, but wondered instead what could replace it as a source of Jewish identity.

The editors of *New Voices* criticized the ways in which the “established” Jewish community tried to preserve Judaism in America, but they did give coverage to the younger generation’s own attempts to work up new interest in Judaism among young Jewry. As Melissa Harvis Renny wrote, young Jews were indeed also creators of Jewish culture. *New Voices* presented some examples of this. The article “Lights Inactive” in April 2002 was about the youth organization Lights in Action that had recently gone out of business. The organization was founded in 1991 and it had been influential in providing Jewish students with a possibility to embrace Jewish culture. Its idea was that Jewish students could create a Jewish life for themselves, and the organization toured at campuses around the country giving advice on how to do it. With its pluralistic attitude, Lights in Action provided a community for all kinds of Jews, held conferences especially aimed for example at queer Jews or children of intermarriage, and held prayer services that were organized in such a way that young Jews from all backgrounds could participate at the same time. Lights in Action seems to have been a pioneer in many senses through the 1990s. It came up with text study groups for students, and soon Hillel – a Jewish organization that organized events and provided premises for Jewish students at campuses around the country – began to organize such groups as well. Lights in Action came up with organized trips to Israel, and soon the Birthright Israel program was launched. In fall 2001, after difficulties with raising funding and continuously looking for new participants, as student groups have to do, the organization ceased to exist.<sup>190</sup>

Another movement run by Jewish students faced similar problems in 2007. “Jews in the Woods” was a collective of Jewish students who organized *Shabbatons* – i.e. weekend meetings with the focus on Sabbath – that were known for their “pluralistic, spiritual environment”. *New Voices* wrote about the group in November 2007. The movement struggled with somewhat similar problems as Lights in Action. What the young Jews liked about it was its casual style and

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<sup>190</sup> Thrope 2002.

flexibility. The collective was able to create something new, and a way to express Judaism that many young Jews found meaningful, as one of the former active members said: “Jews in the Woods is fun, exciting, and experimental. It was a collection of people who were really into what they were doing.” However, when the meetings grew from an organic group of friends to nearly an institution, more organizing was needed and suddenly there were no more interested volunteers to participate in it.<sup>191</sup>

In addition to these two movements, there were also other nonestablishment programs in the early 2000s that were organized by young Jewish adults and differed from the establishment programs for example through their cooperative style of organizing and inclusiveness towards non-members and non-Jews. Among these were independent minyanim that held their own services in private apartments; cultural centers, and different kinds of collectives.<sup>192</sup> These movements show that there were young Jews who were active in organizing Jewish activities and who wanted to come up with ways to express their Jewishness that were suitable for them, instead of just following the older generations and being only consumers of already existing Jewish culture. *Lights in Action* and *Jews in the Woods* show that young Jews had new ideas and they were also successful in putting them into practice. The challenge was that when they were student organizations or collectives, it was difficult for them to become an established part of Jewish culture in the long run, because the activities were based on volunteer work and in some cases there was also actual opposition against them becoming a part of the Jewish “establishment”. What makes the case more complicated, especially in the case of *Lights in Action*, is that the established Jewish community gave funding to it, so even if they wanted to do things in their own way, there was probably some degree of pressure on them to please the funders. However, what both articles indicated was that the atmosphere and significance of the movements remained in the minds of the participants so that they could perhaps direct those experiences to new ideas later.

Another way in which it could be said that young Jews were creators and not consumers was the concept of “half-Jewishness”, which seems to have intrigued young Jews during the turn of the millennium. *New Voices* published a longish article about the concept and the “half-Jew club” of Brown University in

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<sup>191</sup> Bagan 2007 a.

<sup>192</sup> Wertheimer 2011 a, 13–17.

2002. The idea of someone being half-Jewish – mainly meaning a case when only one of his or her parents was Jewish – might seem logical and understandable, but it raised opposition. Orthodox and Conservative Judaism approve matrilineality; in other words, those born of a Jewish mother, or converted, are Jews. Reform also accepts children of a Jewish father as Jews, but none of the groups approve the concept of half-Jewishness. In the article, the Orthodox rabbi Yehoshua Laufer somewhat dismissed the idea by saying that the movement was about “young Jews searching for their identity”. However, some rabbis supported the movement and understood it. Rabbi Alan Flam, then former director of Hillel of Brown University, explained that the young Jews who approved the idea of half-Jewishness saw Judaism more as a culture and less as a faith. Just like a child of one Asian parent and one black parent has a dual identity and might want to embrace them both, these young Jews felt they wanted to figure out how to affirm both of their identities, Flam explained. Nevertheless, the “half-Jew movement” seemed to be becoming more popular among students, and they launched their own website in 2000.<sup>193</sup> No doubt, the internet made it easier for the interested young Jews to participate and learn more about other young Jews with similar feelings about their Jewishness. Also Ari Y. Kelman has noted that the internet has helped younger and perhaps more marginal Jewish people to create communities and participate in larger communal discourse.<sup>194</sup>

The half-Jew movement is a telling example of how young Jews created new ways of being a Jew. They embraced their heritage in ways that the previous Jewish generation was not fully able to accept. It seems that at least the term stayed in use among the young generation of Jews. It was used in several articles in *Heeb* during the time frame of this study, for example in the article about Jewish athletes, where the football player Sage Rosenfels was introduced as a half-Jew<sup>195</sup>, and in another about the actress Maggie Siff, who identified herself as a half-Jew.<sup>196</sup>

I will now move on to the texts in which young Jews discuss their Jewishness in their own words. Through the spring and summer 2002, *New Voices* published several personal stories of young Jews and their experiences as different kinds of Jew. In the April issue, Elizabeth Leis wrote about her life with a

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<sup>193</sup> Lukas 2002.

<sup>194</sup> Kelman 2011, 252–253.

<sup>195</sup> Liz 2004.

<sup>196</sup> Heeb 2009 (2007).



Catholic father and Jewish mother. All her life she had attended Catholic service with her family twice a year, Easter and Christmas, and regularly attended services in synagogue in between. It worked for her family, but in college she found it difficult to find her place in a community where Christians had their own clubs and Jews had their own.<sup>197</sup> In the same issue, Gabriel Rothblatt wrote about his life as an African-American Jew. In the kindergarten, he told his teacher he was a Jew and the teacher reacted, astonished: “You must be mistaken. You’re black; you cannot be Jewish.” Ever since then Rothblatt had felt displaced both in the African-American community and in the Jewish community. He had a positive experience volunteering in Israel, meeting various kinds of Jews around the world, united in supporting Israel. He felt that he had finally found a place where he belonged, but soon faced a setback when an Israeli man once shouted racist insults at him.<sup>198</sup> Another story included Greg E. Saxon, who had converted to Judaism during his service in the United States Naval Academy, because he appreciated “the total sense of community and religion of the Orthodox Jewish tradition”. There were also several texts which were about the ways in which Jews bonded with Chinese people, for example over food in “The Kosher Egg Roll Festival” in New York Chinatown, celebrating both Jewish and Chinese cultures.<sup>199</sup>

The November issue in 2003 featured a rather unusual text by Lisa S. Guthery. In this very personal text, Guthery told the story of her life-changing visit to Ghana. She spent four weeks in Agorve, Ghana with other Jewish volunteers, doing charity work and studying Judaism. This time away from home made her embrace her Judaism, laws of kashrut and Shabbat, and rituals of study more firmly. The experience made her want to devote herself even more to Judaism.<sup>200</sup> These kinds of stories of how young Jews devoted themselves more to the practice of Judaism were not common in *New Voices*. In the text, there was no opposition of the established Jewish community or critique of traditional expressions of Jewishness. Instead, Guthery wanted to tell the readers how Judaism was increasingly more important in her life. This perhaps shows how *New Voices* as a magazine wanted to take all kinds of young Jews into account.

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<sup>197</sup> *New Voices* 2002 e.

<sup>198</sup> *New Voices* 2002 e.

<sup>199</sup> *New Voices* 2002 f, *New Voices* 2002 g.

<sup>200</sup> Guthery 2003.

Another example of a devoted young Jew is the text which is credited to Liz and Stephanie Orenstein. The author<sup>201</sup> of the text explained that she was an active Jew, both at her family's place in Wisconsin and in her studies in Minnesota, but in different ways. She felt that at home she embraced the spiritual and religious side of Judaism by participating and partly conducting the services in the synagogue. In the place where she studied, she participated in Hillel events, joined Friends of Israel and began editing *New Voices*, which she thought was more about cultural Judaism. The author continued to ponder that in the future, she would want to embrace the religious side more again, which had not had much role in her life lately, and still continue to embrace the cultural side as well. The author wrote optimistically that this combination was "sure to make the next chapter of [her] book more complete", meaning that she would feel more fully Jewish.<sup>202</sup>

A slightly different kind of devoted young Jew was Colie Edison, whom *New Voices* interviewed in 2007. Edison was an eloquent person and the president of a Jewish sorority in Tulane University. Later she became famous by participating in the MTV reality show "Real World". In the interview, Edison said that after the show she became more actively Jewish and that she used her fame to promote involvement in Jewish activities for Jewish students.<sup>203</sup> Edison is an interesting example of a young Jew who did what the Jewish community seemed to wish for all influential young Jews to do: tried to engage young Jews into Jewishness. The editors of *New Voices* did encourage young Jews to express Jewishness in their own ways, but did not always approve of the activities that the Jewish community organized for them. It is unclear, however, how Colie Edison felt about this mission of the Jewish community, as the topic was not discussed in the interview.

Another personal story, titled "Ambassador Cowpoke", gave a slightly different angle to the life of young Jews in *New Voices* in 2005. The text is a broadening one in how it showed how a young Jewish boy, who grew up in Nebraska and was the only young Jew within hundreds of miles, had difficulties with mingling with urban young Jews. The author, who calls himself Ben in the text, explained how he was shocked by the "cultural Judaism" of urban, young

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<sup>201</sup> It is unclear whether it is one of the Orensteins or someone else.

<sup>202</sup> Orenstein & Orenstein 2005.

<sup>203</sup> Bagan 2007 b.

Jews, as it was so distant from the expression of Judaism he grew up with.<sup>204</sup> The story is a good reminder that the experience of young Jews who did not grow up in big cities could be significantly different compared with their urban age mates. The voice of these kinds of young Jews is not widely heard in this study, as it concentrates on Jewish college students and urban Jews, who, however, represent the majority of young Jews.<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, the story of Ben indicates that these non-urban young Jews' expressions of Jewishness might have been more family-oriented, as Ben explained about how his family held Jewish traditions, and also more religiously oriented. This seems reasonable in the sense that these are values that one would assume are generally more embraced in the countryside than in urban areas.

Even if most of the writers and readers of *New Voices* seem to have been non-Orthodox Jews, the Orthodox Jewish community was also taken into account in the magazine. The magazine included several personal stories by young Orthodox Jews and some debate about the Yeshiva University, the leading institution of Modern Orthodox movement.

Jonah Charney-Sirott, an active member of United Synagogue Youth (USY), a youth group of Conservative Judaism, wrote in *New Voices* about combining sports and devotion in Judaism in 2003. Charney-Sirott, a Conservative Jew, was asked to resign as the president of his USY chapter when he decided to participate in rowing nationals with his Princeton University team and skip the Shavuot services that would have taken place the same day. He was shocked that he was forced to choose between rowing and Judaism, the two most important things in his life. In the article, Charney-Sirott wrote that it seemed to be a commonplace in Conservative and Orthodox Judaism that athletics should never become so important that it would restrain the practice of Judaism. The guiding principle in Yeshiva University (YU) was that religious observance "should take complete precedence over athletics". A history professor and the coach of YU's basketball team, Jeffrey Gurock, told Charney-Sirott that he did not recruit players who would play on Shabbat and that it was "virtually impossible to be an observant Jew and play at an elite level".<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Senderovich 2005.

<sup>205</sup> A total of 58% of American Jews are college graduates, 25% have some studies in college, and only 4% of all American Jews live in rural areas. Pew Research Center 2013, 46, 111.

<sup>206</sup> Charney-Sirott 2003.

In 2004 and 2005, *New Voices* wrote about the cultural clashes in the Yeshiva University and the debate about the future of this institution, which was informally the “flagship” of the Modern Orthodox world. The pseudonym M.W. wrote about the disunion within the all-male university, where half of the students wore jeans and t-shirt, the other half had dress shirts and suits, and the climate of attitudes was similarly split. YU’s original philosophy was an equal devotion to Toraic and secular study, and M.W.’s concern was that the more conservative side of the university was diminishing the importance of the secular part of their studies.<sup>207</sup> The text received a reply from another student of the YU, who criticized the way in which M.W. addressed the topic in such a public way.<sup>208</sup> M.W. answered to this and stated that the problems should not be solved internally, as YU “sits in a leadership position in the Modern Orthodox world”.<sup>209</sup> In 2005, Ilene Rosenblum wrote an article in *New Voices* where she criticized the prejudices and stereotypes about the students of Stern College, the women’s school of Yeshiva University.<sup>210</sup> Later the same year, Mordechai Shinefeld continued the topic of orthodox students and wrote about the difficulties that these students had in getting along with the Dominican neighbourhood right next to the YU campus. Shinefeld’s attitude towards the institution can be seen in the introductory words: “One might assume that by 2005, almost 80 years after its founding, YU would be integrated into the surrounding community. One would be wrong.”<sup>211</sup> This collage of articles about the Yeshiva University and its students shows that *New Voices* was also interested in the life of orthodox Jewish students. It also suggests that the magazine wanted to show how different Jewish groups struggled with the challenges of adapting to the modern world, and especially, how this struggle looked like from the viewpoint of the young.

During the time frame of this study, *New Voices* also introduced several young Orthodox Jews as individuals. A short personal text about a young orthodox Jewish man gives an example of how observant Jews led life and adapted the Jewish law into a modern lifestyle. This young man was a faithful fan of Boston Red Sox, a baseball team based in Boston. An important playoff game fell on a Jewish holiday, when he had to participate in the celebrations and it was forbidden to use electronics. However, as he said in the text, “the prohibition

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<sup>207</sup> M.W. 2004.

<sup>208</sup> Kochman 2004.

<sup>209</sup> Kochman 2005.

<sup>210</sup> Rosenblum 2005.

<sup>211</sup> Shinefeld 2005.

extends to turning on and off electronics on holy days, but there is nothing wrong with reading by a preset light”. Thus, he interpreted the rule so that when he hid the television in the basement and turned it on before the festivities, he was then able to go there to watch the game after service and dinner. His parents and their guest followed soon: “There we were, nervously sitting on the basement couch in suits and ties having minor heart attacks with every pitch.”<sup>212</sup>

Another interesting representative of Orthodox Judaism was Tova Stulman, a Modern Orthodox Jewish girl from Boston, who moved to Ohio to study criminology. She wrote about her views and life choices in 2005 and explained that in her university, she was a real rarity, a Modern Orthodox Jewish woman, who wore pants, kept kosher and enjoyed partying.<sup>213</sup> The tone of the text indicates that Stulman was proud of her Jewishness and enjoyed confusing people with her unusual background and combination of identity markers.

To conclude, the editors of *New Voices* seem to have been well aware of the situation that young Jews were in during this time. It seems normal and likely that the editors of a student magazine are politically progressive, want to take a stand on issues and openly express it. The texts by the editors give one important picture of young American Jews’ views. The other articles that were written by average readers of the magazine presented perhaps more moderate views on the state of contemporary American Judaism. They also concentrated more on personal stories and experiences. By doing this they gave a very useful perspective for this study. It seems that Jewishness had significance for these young American Jewish students who wrote to *New Voices*, but surely the magazine did not reach all the less active young Jews, whose connection to their Jewishness might have been weaker. Some of the contributors were devotional Jews, some were culturally active and many of them were not afraid to express their opinions about the present state and the future of American Jews.

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<sup>212</sup> Orenstein 2004.

<sup>213</sup> Stulman 2005.

### III Views on Israel and U.S. politics

#### 1. *Israel and Zionism in American Jewish culture*

To put in context the debate at the campuses that *New Voices* wrote about in the early 2000s, one needs to understand the basic elements of the recent historical background of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. European Zionism, formed at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sought a place where Jews could live peacefully, whereas for most Jews in America such hopes had already been fulfilled. Living in diaspora did not bother them. This meant that until World War II, Zionism was mainly irrelevant for American Jews. After WWII, the Holocaust began to transform American Jews' attitude towards Zionism. During the years after the war, Americans were a major force in the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. Nearly half of the American Jewish population belonged to organizations that supported the formation of a Jewish state. and American Jews had a major role in funding the project. Israel became their source of pride and self-respect, and also "a Middle Eastern outpost of American values", as Professor of History Steven Rosenthal puts it. Rosenthal also suggests that supporting Israel was a way for American Jews to alleviate their guilt of not helping European Jews enough during World War II.<sup>214</sup>

The Six Day War in 1967 made Israel a political target of the left wing. However, the war ended up tightening the relationship between American Jews and Israel, when the fears of a renewed Holocaust rose among the American Jewry just before the conflict. In the 1980s, American Jews began to properly question Israeli policies for the first time. The continuing establishment of Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 increased anxiety. Finally, the first *intifada* – a Palestinian uprising – in 1987 clearly raised criticism among American Jewry against Israel. The end of the decade saw a sharp division of American Jews. The left side criticized Israeli repression and called for peace negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the other side accused the left of being politically naive.<sup>215</sup>

The 1990s saw the rise and fall of the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Negotiations in Oslo in 1993 were groundbreaking in the sense that they brought an agreement of formal mutual recognition of the two sides. Israel

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<sup>214</sup> Rosenthal 2005, 209–212.

<sup>215</sup> Novick 2001, 149; Rosenthal 2005, 213–216.

recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), led by Yasir Arafat, as an official representative of the Palestinian people and PLO recognized Israel's right to peace and security. After unsuccessful further negotiations in 1998, finally in July 2000, the U.S. President Bill Clinton held a meeting of a few weeks with Arafat and Ehud Barak, who was elected Prime Minister of Israel in 1999. In facing the challenge of ending a century-long conflict, both leaders also faced a challenge in representing their nations. As the leader of PLO and with an intention to seek peace through compromising, Arafat was not supported by more radical Palestinian groups, such as Hamas. The newly elected Barak had similar difficulties. His predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu had first slowed down the peace process and concentrated on preserving the security of Israel, but later lost his political support after concessions in the negotiations in 1998. If Barak took too critical an attitude towards the negotiations, it would not have been beneficial to the peace process, but too much compromising would have made him lose his political support, as happened to Netanyahu. Large parts of the Israeli population were not eager to compromise with Palestinians. In these unfavorable circumstances, the meeting in July 2000 ended in failure.<sup>216</sup>

Clinton tried one more time in December 2000, just before he left the office, by making his own suggestion of a plan towards a peace settlement. Israeli and Palestinian leaders met to discuss the plan in the Egyptian resort town Taba in January 2001. They concluded the meetings with an announcement that a resolution to the most complex issues was nearer than ever before, but finally these resolutions were not achieved. The mistrust between the two parties had grown through the whole Oslo peace process by each side accusing the other of sabotaging the process. The second *intifada*, Palestinian uprising, began in 2000 in a tense atmosphere of frustration with the peace process. A crucial catalyst was the Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was also a holy place for Muslims, known as *al-Haram al-Sharif*. Palestinians reacted severely, and soon their demonstrations turned into an uprising.<sup>217</sup>

George W. Bush served as the president of the United States from January 2001 to January 2009. Through his presidency, his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict repeatedly changed from moderate to conservative, from strict demands

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<sup>216</sup> Bunton 2013, 91, 95–96.

<sup>217</sup> Bunton 2013, 96–98, 104.

for both sides of the conflict to a full acceptance of all Israeli policies.

Postdoctoral Research Fellow of University of California at Berkeley, Daniel E. Zoughbie argues that this did harm to the peace process that was far from finished after the Clinton's presidency.<sup>218</sup> Bush's indecisiveness, which is the key statement of Zoughbie's study *Indecision Points: George W. Bush and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, was likely frustrating for both pro-Israel conservatives and the critics of Israel.

The first major change in Bush's views came after the terror attacks in September 2001. After the shock, Bush came up with nearly a "divine" mission to spread freedom in the Middle East as he saw the United States as an instrument to facilitate it. His view was that freedom and democracy were the cure to terrorism and the basis for peace in the Middle East.<sup>219</sup> Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this meant that he adopted the view that Palestines should have new, uncorrupted and democratic leadership before the conflict could be solved. This meant that Bush wanted to free Palestine from its leader Yasir Arafat, who was, however, democratically elected. When the Iraq War drew near, Bush moved again to a moderate view that demanded reciprocal concessions from both Israel and Palestine.<sup>220</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell and some others emphasized the importance of continuing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process during the fight against al-Qaeda, but the prevalent view within Bush administration was that Israel should concentrate on its own fight against the terrorist networks threatening it.<sup>221</sup> After his reelection in 2004, Bush kept changing his policies on conflict between conservative and moderate views, also mixing them occasionally.<sup>222</sup> I found it meaningful to picture here the Bush policies on the situation in Israel/Palestine in order to explain what the young Jews opposed when they opposed the Bush administration. In the following sub-chapter there is more discussion on young Jews' views on the U.S. politics, concerning Israel as well.

Yasir Arafat died in 2004, and Palestine became divided when Hamas first won the democratic elections in 2006, and then in 2007 took over the Gaza area from the more moderate Fatah, which was first led by Arafat and later by Mahmoud Abbas. When Israel was increasingly skeptical of a peaceful settlement

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<sup>218</sup> Zoughbie 2014, 3–5, 86, 144, 148.

<sup>219</sup> Zoughbie 2014, 39–40.

<sup>220</sup> Zoughbie 2014, 146.

<sup>221</sup> Bunton 2013, 100.

<sup>222</sup> Zoughbie 2014, 147.



and Palestine was divided both geographically and politically, the solution to the conflict was again further away.<sup>223</sup>

When the situation in Israel grew increasingly complicated and the peace negotiations did not succeed, the American Jewish community urged the young American Jewry to maintain a positive attitude towards Israel. One of the main ways the Jewish community used to increase the younger generation's connection to Israel was the Birthright Israel program, which was launched in 1999. The program has since offered young Jews free trips to Israel, during which they were educated about Israel's history and significance to Jewish people. According to Lila Corwin Berman, the program was a success, especially among such young Jews who felt they were in the margins of the Jewish community. The leading thought behind the program was also against the "volitional Jewishness", the idea that being Jewish is a matter of choice, as its policy was that anyone with at least one Jewish parent could participate in the trip.<sup>224</sup>

*New Voices* included many articles about students' views and experiences on Birthright Israel trips. In November 2003, *New Voices* published several articles about the Birthright Israel program. Alex Halpern wrote an acute analysis about the program, its mission and implementation. When he went on the Birthright Israel trip, his group leader stated that the reason for the trips was that the participants would "get to do it with Jews". The trip would be a sort of high-concept dating service organized by Jewish leaders under the threat of intermarriage. However, Halpern considered the more important mission to be to promote a country (Israel) that was "in desperate need of better public relations". The tone of the article indicated that this was not done very successfully. Halpern criticized the way in which the organizers tried to affect the participants' views about Israel. It becomes clear that Halpern did not appreciate the way they were treated:

As far as the trip's organizers were concerned, we the young and inexperienced had come "home" to see what it meant to be a Jew. - - In New York, I learned, we've got it all wrong.<sup>225</sup>

Halpern was also worried about the fact that the trip gave a very one-sided view of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. In exchange for the trip, the young American participants were asked to support Israel back home.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Bunton 2013, 101–104.

<sup>224</sup> Berman 2009, 172.

<sup>225</sup> Halpern 2003.

<sup>226</sup> Halpern 2003.

Halpern's text received several replies that were published later in *New Voices*. Some of these writers appreciated that "somebody finally wrote about Birthright's flaws", but some contradicted him. Halpern went on the trip through a group called Oranim and in the replies, three writers said that they had enjoyed their Birthright trips that were organized by another group called Kesher, which had for example presented the situation of the conflict more fairly.<sup>227</sup>

In the same issue with Halpern's text, *New Voices* published another text about a trip to Israel by Evan R. Goldstein. His trip, which included only ten participants, was organized by the North American Federation of Temple Youth. Indeed, Goldstein gave a very different view – that is how the article was titled, A Different View – on visiting Israel. For him it was a life-changing experience:

A whole new aspect of my Judaism was opened up to me: prayers began to have new meaning; my Jewish identity grew; I felt a connection. I felt like I was home.<sup>228</sup>

If Halpern criticized the "propaganda" he faced during his Birthright Israel trip, it seems that Goldstein adopted the views that the program promoted during his visit. At the end of his text, he stated that if young American Jews did not go to Israel, they would not be able to "fully grow as Jews", and Israel would "lose the support of its most valuable resource – youth".<sup>229</sup> These views of Goldstein differ from what seems to have been the common opinion among young Jews. However, it was not the only instance in which *New Voices* presented texts about very positive experiences of Israel. In December 2004, the magazine published another text by Max Chaiken, in which Chaiken discussed his time in Israel via a study program called Carmel. In addition to the great memories, Chaiken wrote, Carmel gave the participants a chance to define "[their] Jewish identity and [their] Jewish and Zionist values".<sup>230</sup> In many instances, young Jews in the sources of this study questioned the unconditional support for Israel, but as this text shows, not all young Jews were against the centrality of supporting Israel in American Jewish culture.

In addition to the stories about Birthright Israel trips, *New Voices* covered the topic from different angles. In 2006, the magazine published an article about another Israel tour organized by a group called Birthright Unplugged. The group was founded in 2004 with a mission to more fairly show both sides of the conflict, in contrast with the larger organizers of Birthright trips. The participants of

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<sup>227</sup> Kochman 2003.

<sup>228</sup> Goldstein 2003.

<sup>229</sup> Goldstein 2003.

<sup>230</sup> Chaiken 2004.

Birthright Unplugged tours had a chance to meet both Israeli and Palestinian political activists, local communities, and Palestinian people whose everyday life was made difficult due to the Israeli policies. Birthright Unplugged and other “alternative tourism” groups were very small compared with the main organizers of Birthright Israel trips.<sup>231</sup> The fact that *New Voices* gave coverage to these marginal groups indicates that the editors of the magazine saw them as meaningful and important parts of the whole issue of how young American Jews connected with Israel.

Another such article was written by Daniela Gerson, one of the chief editors of *New Voices*, who actively expressed her opinions in several articles. She wrote in April 2003 about young Israeli soldiers in the Israeli Defence Forces.<sup>232</sup> The focus of this article was to give a voice to these young Israelis, who were widely admired by the Birthright participants but who did not feel such pride in serving in the army. Instead, they wished that the Birthright participants would return from the trip with less black-and-white views about the complicated situation. The young soldiers felt sorry for the one-sided way in which the conflict was pictured in the western media but also expressed that they were not proud of using violence and in extreme cases, killing people. It was not pleasant for them, it was just what they had to do because the government of Israel demanded them to.<sup>233</sup> By presenting this viewpoint of the conflict, *New Voices* gave a wider picture of the situation in Israel and showed what kind of difficulties it created for the young Israeli Jews. They published an article like this probably because they wanted young Jews to understand the complexity of the situation. As can be seen in other articles written by Gerson, some of which are addressed later in this study, it seems that she especially seems to have seen her mission as providing young Jews with different views and contesting the old ways of seeing various issues.

To put these findings in *New Voices* in context and to give statistical information to compare with the findings in the two following sub-chapters, I will now briefly present some statistics about the American Jewish views on Israel. In 2013, the Pew Research Center survey found out that around 70% of American Jews felt they were emotionally very attached or somewhat attached to Israel. According to the report of the survey, the number was nearly the same in 2000–

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<sup>231</sup> Yael Bek 2006.

<sup>232</sup> Israeli men serve a minimum of three years in the armed forces, and women one year and nine months. Gerson 2003.

<sup>233</sup> Gerson 2003.

2001, when the most recent National Jewish Population Survey was conducted. In the 2013 survey, it was found out that the number was slightly smaller in the younger age groups. In both of the age groups 18–29 and 30–49, around 60% were emotionally very attached or somewhat attached to Israel.<sup>234</sup> Concerning the role of Israel in American Jewish culture, 43% of American Jews answered that caring about Israel was an “Essential part of being Jewish” and 44% considered it “Important but not essential”.<sup>235</sup> In the youngest age groups, smaller proportions considered caring about Israel as being an essential part of being Jewish: 32% in 18–29 and 38% in 30–49. Thus, as the survey suggested, older Jews were more likely than younger to consider caring about Israel as being an essential part of being Jewish.<sup>236</sup>

Considering the American Jews’ view on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, some differing tendencies could be found between the young and the old. The younger generation was more skeptical of the Israeli government’s efforts to bring about a peace settlement than all the older generations, and compared with older age groups, a bigger proportion of ages 18–29 – only 18%, though – saw that Palestinian leadership was making a sincere effort in the same case. The young Jews were also more optimistic about achieving a peaceful two-state solution in which Israel and an independent Palestinian state could coexist peacefully. Furthermore, the youngest age group was also the most critical against the U.S. support for Israel: 25% of the Jews aged 18–29 thought that the United States was too supportive for Israel, whereas the proportion in for example ages 50+ was only 6%.<sup>237</sup> These tendencies are reflected in the writings in *New Voices* and *Heeb*. As the sources show in the following sub-chapters, especially *Heeb* was critical towards the excessive support for Israel, and *New Voices* was not afraid to make different views on the situation more public for young Jewry.

## **2. American Politics and Israel in the writings in Heeb and New Voices**

As mentioned earlier, most American Jews have traditionally been more liberal than conservative and are more likely to support Democrats than Republicans.<sup>238</sup> This trend – or more an assumption – could be seen in several instances in the

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<sup>234</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 82.

<sup>235</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 83. There was four options to this question: these two, “Not important part of being Jewish” and “Don’t know”.

<sup>236</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 83–84.

<sup>237</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 87, 89, 93.

<sup>238</sup> As seen e.g. in Pew Research Center 2013, 97.

sources of this study as well. Both magazines, *New Voices* and *Heeb*, openly stated at some point<sup>239</sup> that they were left-leaning, and this could be seen in their style of writing and the points of view in their texts. However, both magazines also published differing views. At the beginning of the new millennium, according to Sylvia Barack Fishman, young Jewish leaders – in which the editors of *Heeb* and *New Voices* can be counted – were critical of both Jewish tribalism and American nationalism. Regarding their political stances, they resembled more their young, non-Jewish fellow Americans than previous generations of Jews. This meant that they saw, according to Fishman, “the world through at least partially post-nationalist, global eyes” and were “sensitive to moral weaknesses and political mistakes associated with the American government.” They embraced ideals of tolerance and inclusivity, which could be seen for example in their critical stances towards the Israeli policies.<sup>240</sup> During the time frame of this study, the magazines commented for example on the war in Iraq, the presidential elections in 2004 and on the early campaigns for the elections in 2008. Concerning the situation in Israel, the second *intifada* between 2000–2005 and the subsequent unrest affected the discussions about the relations of American Jews to Israel.

One of the ways in which *Heeb* wanted to take a stand on these topics was interviewing known academics and intellectuals. Most of the material in the magazine was making fun of things, joking and having fun, but in addition to that, *Heeb* also wanted to show opinions. The interviews were made with mainly liberal intellectuals on the Left, nearly all of them Jewish. An exception was Cornel West, an academic and philosopher, who was not a Jew but was known for his work in black-Jewish relations. *New Voices*, on the other hand, concentrated more on the views of young Jewish students and published the students’ opinions about the elections and the American field of politics in general.

Understandably, in accordance with their political stances, *Heeb* criticized conservative Christians, whose ideology influenced American foreign policy through the Bush administration.<sup>241</sup> In an *Urban Kvetch* text in 2007, the pseudonym Yid Vicious mocked those Republicans who referred to the Founding Fathers when supporting conservative values:

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<sup>239</sup> E.g. Snyder 2001, Moore 2002.

<sup>240</sup> Fishman et al 2011, 202.

<sup>241</sup> jessie 2004 c.

You think because Jefferson believed in “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, he’d be “pro-life”? You think that because Ben Franklin liked to shoot at deer in the woods he’d be all for semi-automatic machine guns being sold at Wal-Mart?<sup>242</sup>

Conservative politicians were joked about also in a blog text “Do You Feel a Draft?”<sup>243</sup> in *Heeb*’s “Jewdar” series in 2007 and in another article by “Jewdar” about the case of a Republican Senator of Idaho, Larry Craig, who was accused of sexual misconduct in a Minnesota airport men’s room.<sup>244</sup>

*Heeb* also criticized those in the Jewish community who supported conservative Christians mainly or only because of the support they gave to the state of Israel. In the article “Wrong Numbers”, Sara Marcus explained that as anti-Semitism rose after 9/11, conservative voices in the United States hurried to accuse the Left for the phenomenon, referring to their critique against the government of Ariel Sharon in Israel. In this way, Marcus wrote, conservatives gained support within parts of the Jewish community, as they took the role of defending Israel.<sup>245</sup> Another article, titled “Unholy Alliance”,<sup>246</sup> in 2003 showed *Heeb*’s opposition against president George W. Bush. The article began with the notion that the Jewish vote had always gone to a Democratic presidential candidate, with only a few exceptions. It continued with a sense of anxiety that due to the crisis in the Middle East, some Jewish Americans began to support the Bush administration in order to support Israel, and in the process “abandoned their pluralistic agendas”.<sup>247</sup> The article in the context of the presidential campaigns during 2003–2004 seems very critical towards the attitude of those Jews whose support for Israel exceeded all other values. It also shows how the young Jews contributing to *Heeb* opposed both Bush and those in the Jewish community who supported him.

David G. Myers, who wrote about “hipster Judaism” in *Commentary* in 2009, also noted that hipster Jews were “offended by George W. Bush”. In his critical tone, Myers wrote that the only thing the hipster Jews were not ironic about was politics, such as supporting Barack Obama – who was considered “cool” – or being environmentally conscious.<sup>248</sup> Myers seems not to have seen

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<sup>242</sup> Heeb 2010 f (2007).

<sup>243</sup> jewdar 2007 a.

<sup>244</sup> jewdar 2007 b.

<sup>245</sup> jessie 2005 b. An excerpt of the original article.

<sup>246</sup> jessie 2003 c. An excerpt of the original article.

<sup>247</sup> jessie 2003 c.

<sup>248</sup> Myers 2009.

much value in their political actions, such as the campaign “the Great Schlep”,<sup>249</sup> launched by the comedian Sarah Silverman, one of the main figures of hipster Judaism.

Similarly as in *Heeb*, opposition against the Bush administration could be found in *New Voices* as well. Miriam Felton-Dansky wrote in November 2004 – only a day before the presidential elections – an opinion about the presidential campaigning directed to the Jewish voters in Florida. She strongly disagreed with the assumption that Bush was a “better friend of Israel”. The assumption was formed because of his close relationship with Ariel Sharon. At the end of the text, Felton-Dansky harshly criticized Bush’s policies and explained why there was no reason to consider Bush a better choice for Israel than the Democratic candidate John Kerry.<sup>250</sup>

As explained in the third introduction sub-chapter, it was a commonplace that the Americans in entertainment business and cultural scene criticized Bush, and it was evidently true concerning *Heeb*. It does not seem surprising either that this was in most cases seen in *New Voices* as well, especially in the writings of the editors of the magazine.

However, there were differing views within young Jewry and the material in *New Voices* shows several examples of how the magazine gave room for these views and new ways to look at things. A Jewish student, who seems to have wanted to stay anonymous, admitted in 2004 that he or she will vote Libertarian, not Republican or Democrat. The writer acknowledged how unusual a stance this was for a Jew and explained how the Libertarians were “much like the wandering Jew.”<sup>251</sup> No one wants us, no one understands us —”. In the writer’s opinion, neither President Bush nor Senator Kerry would have been a good choice for the Jewish people.<sup>252</sup> In 2005, after the elections, the magazine published an aptly titled article “Yep, I’m A Republican (And Jewish)”, an autobiographical essay about a Jewish man who had known since his childhood that he was a Republican. The writer said that 76% of American Jews voted for John Kerry in the elections 2004 and continued by questioning why there was a correlation between being liberal and being Jewish, when there was also much conservative ideology in the

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<sup>249</sup> Young Jews were encouraged to travel to Florida to convince their grandparents to vote Barack Obama.

<sup>250</sup> Felton-Dansky 2004.

<sup>251</sup> A legend of a Jew, who is doomed to wander around the world until the end times.

<sup>252</sup> *New Voices* Staff 2004.

tradition of Judaism.<sup>253</sup> It is telling that it was worth writing an essay with a focus on only the fact that the writer was a Republican. It shows how unusual it was for a Jew to openly and actively be a Republican.

*New Voices* also questioned the usual ways of action in American politics. In 2005, a student writer<sup>254</sup> told how she or he had supported Democratic Tony Knowles' campaign for the Senate in Alaska. During the campaign, the writer was open about her/him being Jewish, which the other campaigners did not appreciate, as Democrats had traditionally not used their faith in campaigning. After explaining this, the writer continued pondering why was it not approved by Democrats to use religion that way, while it was a commonplace for Republicans, and stated that this should change, at least concerning the Jews who voted for Democrats.<sup>255</sup>

In 2007, *Heeb* commented on the candidates of the next presidential elections a few times. The Republican candidate Mitt Romney was presented due to the fact that he had admitted he believed in the evolution theory. The text, obscurely titled "Romney Hearts Dinosaurs" was not very favorable though:

He may be pro-life, anti-gay marriage and, um... a 'Mormon' but at least Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney believes in 'evolution'.<sup>256</sup>

However, *Heeb* did not restrict its criticism only to Republicans. In July 2007, *Heeb* published a strong opinion against Hillary Clinton in a blog text "Hot and Bothered over Hillary". The text indicated that winning the election after the two terms of George W. Bush would be an easy task for the Democrats, as long as they did not nominate Hillary Clinton. *Heeb* obviously wished for the Democrats to win, however:

We at Jewdar simply pray that — the Dems don't shoot themselves in the foot by nominating a candidate who may very well be the most hated woman in America.<sup>257</sup>

Unfortunately the material until the end of 2007 did not offer more insights on *Heeb*'s opinions about the elections in 2008. These examples, however, already show the ways in which *Heeb* wanted to comment on the elections and also take a stance on the topic. *New Voices* did not comment on the campaigns yet in 2007.

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<sup>253</sup> Marglin 2005. The text is credited to Jessica Marglin, but the text clearly indicates that the writer is a man.

<sup>254</sup> The text is credited to Rebecca Kochman, but she might but not be the actual writer. It seems that she was one of the editors that year, as also two collections of readers' replies in the archive are credited to her. This suggests that this text is not her own either.

<sup>255</sup> Kochman 2005 b.

<sup>256</sup> rebecca 2007 f.

<sup>257</sup> jewdar 2007 c.



Through the time frame of this study, *Heeb* presented many Jewish, politically Left intellectuals. These interviewees were not representatives of young Jews, at least no longer, but the interviews showed some views and stances of the editors of *Heeb* and the way of writing indicates that these intellectuals were appreciated and considered interesting. Through presenting these influential, progressive Jews, the editors of *Heeb* saw themselves as a part of this politically active Jewish tradition. It could be said that Jewishness had significance for them as informed political activism.

In 2004, Jennifer Bleyer interviewed Professor of Linguistics Noam Chomsky, a famous academic who was known for his severe critique against the U.S. Government.<sup>258</sup> The way the interview was introduced indicates that Chomsky was considered an interesting, admirable person. It was for example mentioned that he had released a split 7-inch single with the punk rock band Bad Religion to demonstrate against the first Gulf War in 1991. Chomsky was also referred to as “a smiling and wrinkled old, anarchist Jew” and “a sort of lefty Yoda”, a reference to the Star Wars movie character, Jedi master Yoda. In the interview, Chomsky discussed his stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict and explained by intellectual basis why he opposed Israeli policies. He for example said that if the United States was a Christian state, it would be strongly opposed by Jews in America, so likewise it should be opposed that Israel is a Jewish state, which affects the everyday life of non-Jewish people in Israel. Chomsky was also very strict about the use of the Holocaust in the debate:

— you can’t think of a worse insult to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust than to conjure them up as a justification for your own oppressive practices. That’s just disgraceful.<sup>259</sup>

The admiring introduction by Bleyer and the way of writing the text indicate that Chomsky was appreciated and his character presented what *Heeb* wanted to present. If Chomsky’s views were not approved by the makers, most likely he would not have been compared to the popular, wise character Yoda. It would seem then that Chomsky’s views resonated with the views the makers of *Heeb*.

Al Franken is another leftist and Jewish influential figure who seems to fit in the general opinion in *Heeb*. Franken, who was a former comedian and later political activist, writer and satirist, was interviewed in 2004 in the same issue as Chomsky. In the interview, Franken strongly criticized right-wing Republicans.

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<sup>258</sup> *Heeb* 2010 e (2004).

<sup>259</sup> *Heeb* 2010 e (2004).

He said that he loved his country, the United States, but that “you have to love your country like an adult loves somebody, not like a child loves its mommy”. In his opinion, the latter was what the right-wing did, and “everything Mommy does is okay”.<sup>260</sup> This again resonates with the common style found in the texts of *Heeb*, where they criticized or ridiculed conservative politicians.

Another interview in *Heeb* involved an academic, the philosopher Cornel West talking about young American Jews and also their views about Israel. In his view, two significant new patterns could be seen in the thoughts of young American Jewry. First, they opposed materialism, which had been an essential part of middle-class life, both Jewish and non-Jewish, for several decades. They sought for meaning and significance, not just material. The second feature was their stand towards Israel, which was linked to Jewish identity as a whole. The young generation of American Jews, according to West, was not afraid to oppose the idea that defending Israel on every occasion would be an essential part of Jewish identity. West saw that behind this, there was a “hunger for a richer, deeper understanding of Jewish identity”.<sup>261</sup> His view seems to fit in the picture that Eisen and Cohen described: the significance of the “grand narrative” of the Jewish community was declining.<sup>262</sup> If West’s description was correct, the young generation were forming their Jewish identity outside the traditional narrative of Jewish people, in which Israel and Zionism had previously had an important slot.

Israel was also covered in an interview with the hip-hop group the Beastie Boys in 2004. Acknowledging the fact that the group had performed in a support concert for the freedom of Tibet, the interviewer Arye Dworken asked two members of the group, Ad-Rock and MCA, whether they saw a parallel between the situation of Tibet and of Israel and Palestine. MCA stated strongly that it was clearly a different case, as Tibetans did not react violently. Concerning the situation in Israel, he first said that there was violence on both sides and continued vehemently:

—both sides need to chill the fuck out already. It’s enough already...excuse me for cursing. Sorry.<sup>263</sup>

The two continued by looking back on their concert in Tel Aviv in 1994 and explaining that the event felt special to them. The third member, Mike D, said that he had felt that Israeli people really needed a show like that in their situation. All

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<sup>260</sup> Liz 2009 b (2004).

<sup>261</sup> Ratzman 2004.

<sup>262</sup> Cohen & Eisen 2001.

<sup>263</sup> Dworken 2004.

three agreed that Israel was a great place to be and especially MCA felt that Israel was an incredible place and wished that the problems could be solved soon as it was an important thing that Israel existed. He explained that it felt special for a Jew to see a Jewish state with Hebrew written and spoken everywhere.<sup>264</sup> In the interview, The Beastie Boys did not focus on the politics of Israel but wished for the violence to end on both sides. They concentrated on describing how special a place and community Israel was and how it had its own atmosphere. This suggests that they were not highly critical of Israel in general.

*Heeb* as a representative of its generation cannot be seen as extremely critical towards Israel, but it did give response to that around 40% of Jews of younger generations who, according to the Pew Research Center in 2013,<sup>265</sup> did not feel emotionally attached to Israel. The magazine criticized those who supported Israel in every situation and published opinions that suggested it was a good thing that the young Jews were thinking critically. By interviewing Jewish intellectuals of the Left and giving space to their views, *Heeb* was perhaps able to promote these views to their young and urban Jewish audience. It is no surprise that these young Jews in the liberal atmosphere of New York poked fun at conservative voices and openly showed their liberal views. This kind of trend was somewhat present also in *New Voices*, but it seems that they tried to represent a larger community of young Jews, thus publishing also varying political opinions.

### **3. Pro-Israel or Pro-Palestine? – Conflicting views at campuses**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the situation in Israel had grown especially tense again. As the first *intifada* had raised critical voices among American Jewry in the late 1980s, so did the second *intifada* at the beginning of the new millennium divide opinions. The younger generation of Jews began to question unconditional support to Israel. In 2002, *New Voices* magazine featured many articles about the situation in Israel from the students' point of view. The second *intifada* had been on for two years and the 9/11 attacks were still fresh in memory, so it was a current topic for students, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

“It’s not easy being a pro-Israel student nowadays, that is unless you’re a guest on ABC’s late-night television show Politically Incorrect.” That is how a *New Voices* article about the talk show host Bill Maher began in February 2002.

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<sup>264</sup> Dworken 2004.

<sup>265</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 82.

Maher had shown a strong support for Israel in his show, in which he interviewed two Jewish college students and two Arab students on the subject. Maher had been so active in challenging the Arab students, the author wrote, that the Jewish students could barely participate in the discussion.<sup>266</sup>

However, it seems that it truly was not easy being a pro-Israel student. Two months later, *New Voices* featured an article by Deborah Meyers titled “Lonely Struggle”, which concentrated on experiences of pro-Israel students at the colleges around the United States. As pro-Palestinian student activists had widely gathered attention with various well-organized events around the campuses in the United States, those students who wanted to support Israel had had trouble providing the other viewpoint in the debate. In the article, Meyers interviewed Avner Even-Zohar, who was the director of the campus division of the Israel Center of San Francisco. Even-Zohar assumed that states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or the Emirates might have sponsored pro-Palestine students organizations, which enabled them to organize major events with various speakers. The pro-Israel students’ difficulty was that they did not receive such support from Israel or Jewish organizations at the same level.<sup>267</sup>

Thus, pro-Israel students began to organize such support themselves. In the San Francisco Bay Area, several students had founded an alliance called “Jewish Students For Peace”, whose aim was to “equip students with the information and the techniques that will enable them to advocate for Israel intelligently, not simply emotionally”. Josh Horwatt, a student in the University of California in Davis:

—[Pro-Palestinian activists] have got some good points, and a lot of Jewish students don’t know how to argue effectively, which can just make it worse.<sup>268</sup>

A second-year student Hadar Cadouri explained that to be able to debate, the students needed knowledge. So far, this was not what they were given. In a conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Cadouri was instead advised to use short slogans, such as “Israel wants peace but has no partner”. He felt that repeating such slogans without being able to continue with more substance was not helpful. As a response to these kind of views, a new initiative called “Education for Middle Eastern Truth” was founded in 2001 in order to give pro-Israel students tools and knowledge to tackle the issue.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> *New Voices* 2002 c.

<sup>267</sup> Meyers 2002.

<sup>268</sup> Meyers 2002.

<sup>269</sup> Meyers 2002.

When looking at the numbers of participants in the pro-Israel student groups and educational programs, as they were presented in the article,<sup>270</sup> it seems that they really were not a big group. Pro-Palestine activists' events were described as having gathered attention and having been well-organized. The article only mentioned those Jewish students who supported Israel, so it is not clear how many, if any, Jewish students participated in the pro-Palestine events. However, those pro-Israel students who were interviewed were well aware of their situation on the defensive. Josh Horwatt admitted that pro-Palestine students did have good points and there seemed to be a consensus that pro-Israel students wanted to debate with knowledge and facts, even if in the AIPAC conference they were encouraged to use simplified messages. This perhaps tells something about the difference between Jewish generations. The view in AIPAC was that pro-Palestine arguments could be countered with simple slogans. This view seems to concentrate on rhetorics and just gaining support, whereas the student activists wanted knowledge to be able to debate effectively. At least this is how the article seems to have presented the situation.

Not only did the pro-Israel students feel unable to participate in the debates, but in some cases they even felt threatened. *New Voices* wrote in October 2002 about the San Francisco State University, where Jewish students met harsh opposition by pro-Palestine activists at a rally organized by the University Hillel. The activists had shouted such aggressive comments as "Jews off our campus" and "Hitler did not finish the job".<sup>271</sup>

The pro-Israel side had their radical activists as well. In March 2002, *New Voices* wrote about a group of about 30 students who had rallied in New York to shut down the Palestine Liberation Organization's office. Their argument was that an organization which "sponsors terrorists" was a terrorist group itself and especially after 9/11, there should be no office for terrorists in New York City. The article made clear that the opinion was not largely approved in the Zionist circles. A Labor Zionist youth organization leader stated that there were many Jews who did not approve of the idea. Their view was that there should remain a channel for discussion, even if they were "not so fond of the PLO".<sup>272</sup> This indicates that the protesters' attitude towards PLO did not really represent the big picture.

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<sup>270</sup> Meyers 2002.

<sup>271</sup> *New Voices* 2002 d.

<sup>272</sup> *New Voices* 2002 b.

A Jewish college graduate and a contributor of *New Voices*, Daniela Gerson, wrote in 2002 about her own experiences as a supporter of Israel among her left-leaning friends. During her studies, she felt committed to issues like human rights and social justice, just like many of her friends. However, her friends could not understand how then could she be pro-Israel. According to Gerson, all of them saw the situation in Israel in black and white, not understanding the complexity of the issue. In the text, she explained that she did not approve all actions of Israel and saw that both sides shared the responsibility for the violence. Still, she felt that Israel was an important part of her identity.<sup>273</sup> In the same year, Gerson also wrote that in her opinion, young Jews had “a unique perspective and potential influence on Middle East and domestic policy”, especially during the *intifada* and War on Terrorism. She felt sorry that the voice of young Jews was not heard in the Jewish community.<sup>274</sup> This connects with her view that young Jewish students should be allowed to participate in the discussion of the situation in the Middle East more as they perhaps understood the complexity of the issue better than for example eager pro-Palestine activists.

The war in Iraq began in March 2003. The war was widely opposed in the United States and there were anti-war demonstrations in the country. In April 2003, *New Voices* published several texts in its “Campus Diaries” series, which included a text by Julie Weltz about the anti-war demonstrations. With her Jewish friend, she had participated in some protests and noticed a tendency that often these protests against the war in Iraq had turned into anti-Israel protests that featured for example posters of Israeli flags in which the Star of David had been replaced by a swastika. They felt that this was unfair and it alienated many Jews from the anti-war movement. When they had tried to bring up the issue in a Campus Anti-war Network conference, they were severely criticized and mocked.<sup>275</sup>

Similar news continued in 2004. Noah Liben reported from the Columbia University that the screening of the film *Columbia Unbecoming*, a report of anti-Israel intimidation at Columbia, was followed by more accusations against the pro-Israel students who had organized the screening. According to Liben, these anti-Israel insults had leaned towards traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes. These tendencies made the atmosphere in Columbia feel anti-Semitic, not only anti-

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<sup>273</sup> Gerson 2002 a.

<sup>274</sup> Gerson 2002 b

<sup>275</sup> New Voices 2003 a.

Israel. Liben then told that other students had reported that they had faced harassment because they were wearing *keffiyehs*, the Palestinian scarves, and then he concluded that all the students should stand up against all forms of intimidation.<sup>276</sup>

The news about the experiences of Jewish, pro-Israel students, how they were treated due to their opinions and how the whole conflict was seen at campuses tell about the everyday life of young Jewish students. Depending on their stance on the subject and the strictness of their views, it could have had an influence in their social relations. Jewish students did have justified reasons to not support Israel, but in addition, the circumstances at campuses did not at all encourage them to lean towards pro-Israel, even if this might have been the wish of the older generations in the Jewish community. This could have led the pro-Israel views to recede increasingly.

The case of *New Voices* editor Josh Nathan-Kazis' article about pro-Israel speaker and activist Walid Shoebat is an interesting example of critical voices in *New Voices* and how strong opinions were treated. Nathan-Kazis wrote a long and critical article about Walid Shoebat, a "reformed terrorist" as he was called, and his manager Keith Davies. Shoebat was a former Palestinian citizen who escaped and later toured around the world speaking for Israel. The part that seems to have troubled Nathan-Kazis the most is the fact that Shoebat is openly an Evangelical Christian, a Christian Zionist. Shoebat was presented as an eloquent speaker and his story gave him credibility in the minds of the audience to speak against Palestine and to absolve Israel from responsibility of the conflict. Nathan-Kazis explained that Shoebat's manager Keith Davies had already during the writing of the article accused him of writing about the subject in the wrong light and in a way that would be harmful for Israel.<sup>277</sup> After the article was published, Davies wrote a letter to the editor where he again criticized Nathan-Kazis by calling the article "a litany of inaccuracies and innuendo". In the reply, Davies listed all the things he considered were wrong in the original article and explained the situation in Israel-Palestine in a clearly pro-Israel light. In the conclusion, he tried to win the students onto his side and accused Nathan-Kazis of believing in propaganda:

College students usually take up the cause of the underdog. In this case, Israel is the underdog. But people like Nathan-Kazis have been taken in by the Arab's

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<sup>276</sup> Liben 2004.

<sup>277</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2004.

widespread, anti-Semitic, anti-Israel propaganda machine. In short, he doesn't know what he's talking about.<sup>278</sup>

After writing a critical article about a pro-Israel activist, Nathan-Kazis received a harsh reply and was accused of presenting the situation inaccurately and thus doing harm to Israel. What this perhaps shows is that it was not an easy situation to publicly support any strong opinions. Pro-Israel students were harassed by pro-Palestine students and when an editor of *New Voices* wrote a critical article about a pro-Israel activist, he was treated unfairly.

The conflict between pro-Israel and pro-Palestine students was seen not only in campaigns and other events at campuses, but also in classrooms. In 2002, Daniela Gerson wrote about a website called Campus Watch, whose mission was to gather information from students about those professors and teachers of the Middle Eastern studies whose standpoint on the subject was "too Arab-minded" or who were considered too critical against the U.S. foreign policies concerning the situation in Israel. Gerson acknowledged that it was true that there were anti-Israel tendencies on campuses but strongly opposed the way in which this "problem" was tackled by Campus Watch. She explained how their activities were compared with McCarthyism – the rigorous anti-Communist surveillance during the Cold War – and how they contradicted the basic value of academic freedom. She added that it was never beneficial to learn only from like-minded people and discussed a friend of hers who had had very good experiences at classes held by a professor who openly had more sympathy for the Arab side of the conflict.<sup>279</sup>

The coverage of the case about supposed anti-Israel harassment by the professors of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures (MEALAC) studies was continued by Cara Unowsky in 2005. After the publication of the film *Columbia Unbecoming* in autumn 2004, a group of Columbia University students, who were also behind the film, founded a group called Columbians for Academic Freedom (CAF). Despite the name, however, Unowsky argued that the group's agenda was actually in many senses against academic freedom. The aim of CAF was substantially to promote the freedom of speech at the campus, and their argument was that MEALAC professors had suppressed the pro-Israel students' views. Unowsky disagreed and explained that by preventing professors from expressing views that contradicted pro-Israel students' views, the group was actually against academic freedom. She continued with anxiety by discussing the

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<sup>278</sup> Kochman 2004 b.

<sup>279</sup> Gerson 2002 c.



Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC), which had launched a national hotline for students to report anti-Israel bias on the classes and campus. Unowsky stated that all this was taking the next generation of American Jews into the wrong direction. In her opinion, it was highly useful for young Jews to learn to confront different opinions and to argue about them:

If MEALAC classes are generally slanted toward the pro-Palestinian, it is a minority perspective in American media and politics – making MEALAC a place where students will likely become more open-minded, not less.<sup>280</sup>

In addition, Unowsky continued, the national hotline by ICC sent “the frightening message” that whenever young Jewish students faced something controversial or something that offended them, they can just report it to some distant organization instead of evaluating and perhaps refuting it intelligently.<sup>281</sup>

Unowsky and Gerson, both editors of *New Voices*, agreed that it was not harmful for Jewish students to encounter different kinds of views on their classes. Their view seems to have been that with these arrangements, pro-Israel student groups and the Jewish community behind them reacted too strongly and in the wrong way. They considered that Jewish students were able to confront intellectual, substantiated opinions about the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and that it was good for them, whereas pro-Israel student groups viewed these opinions right away as anti-Israel harassment. It seems that *New Voices* tried to promote and embrace the fact that there were varying and dissenting views among Jewish students around the country. Unowsky, for example, seemed to understand the CAF students, even if she did not agree with their cause.

The demand for the Jewish community to better accept the plurality of ways of being a young Jew could be seen in other *New Voices* texts as well. Nitzan Ziv wrote in 2005 that she had done an internship with Hillel, the national Jewish organization that offered Jewish students facilities and activities at campuses around the country. The argument of Ziv was that Hillel – which, according to Ziv, was “an organization that advocates pluralism and works to engage young Jews” – did not take the differing views and stances of young Jews into account well enough. Ziv, as an intern, was along with other interns obliged to participate in the “Salute To Israel Parade”, which was, according to Hillel, an apolitical event. However, Ziv felt that the event obviously had a political affiliation, and she did not feel comfortable expressing her own connection to Israel through such

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<sup>280</sup> Unowsky 2005 a.

<sup>281</sup> Unowsky 2005 a.

an event. The concluding line of the article carried a clear statement: “It is inappropriate for Hillel to ask students to take a unified stance on this issue.”<sup>282</sup>

The issue was tackled in *New Voices* from a wider standpoint as well. A Jewish student, Josh Harrison, pondered the question in a student editorial text in 2004. He wrote that during his years in high school, he was often taught that Jews must support Israel, as “if we don’t support Israel, nobody will”. Harrison turned this around and stated that Jews were actually obliged to criticize Israel. If Jews themselves did not criticize Israel, who would, as everyone else who did that were mostly rejected and labeled as anti-Semites. Harrison continued by comparing the situation during the Vietnam War. The critics of the war were called anti-American, and the critics of Israel were later denounced in the same way. Still, the general opinion later was that the critics were right about the war in Vietnam. Harrison felt that he had an obligation to point out those Israeli policies that contradicted Jewish values.<sup>283</sup>

An example of how *New Voices* tried to represent the variety of views about the topic, could be found in an editorial text in 2004.<sup>284</sup> The writer of the text argued that young Jews are taught that they have to defend Israel from all critique, but as Israel was not the safest place for Jews, and they were better off for example in the United States, not many understood why Israel should still exist and have such a special status. The Jewish community was not able to explain why Israel was still important for American Jews: “Instead we are told we must support Israel because it is in danger, and because we are all in danger with it.” The Birthright Israel program was created in order to develop a connection between young Jews and Israel, but still it did not give reasons why such a connection should still exist. However, the writer did not want to dismiss Zionism, but urged for new, positive definitions for Zionism and more understanding about the original views and missions of early Zionists:

For if we are only defending Israel because we feel obliged, and not because we see it as a place where our collective hopes can be realized, then the Jewish state has turned from a dream into a burden.<sup>285</sup>

As the selection of articles in this sub-chapter shows, the obligation to support Israel had indeed become a burden to some Jewish students. This led them to

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<sup>282</sup> Ziv 2005.

<sup>283</sup> Harrison 2004.

<sup>284</sup> *New Voices* 2004.

<sup>285</sup> *New Voices* 2004.

struggle with whether Israel should still have such a role in their Jewishness as it did for previous generations.

The issue 30 of *Contemporary Jewry* journal in 2010 focused solely on a debate about the “Distancing Hypothesis”, a hypothesis created by Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman which main thesis was that younger generations of American Jews were less attached to Israel. Cohen and Kelman base their thesis on several currents: firstly, decreasing significance of formal Jewish organizations in American Jewish life; secondly, declining indicators of American Jews’ ethnic cohesion and thirdly, new ways of creating a Jewish identity, which links with a detachment from fixed identities of all sorts that has been noticed in other spheres.<sup>286</sup> Of these currents, at least the smaller role that the Jewish organizations had in the life of young Jews could be seen in the writings of *New Voices*. Some of the editors, such as Josh Nathan-Kazis and Melissa Harvis Renny, wrote critically about the Jewish community’s outreach towards the young. Jewish student Hadar Cadouri had negative experiences when he tried to get advice to debates about Israel from pro-Israel Jewish organizations. As mentioned earlier in this study, young Jewish adults did not tend to feel obliged to participate in Jewish communal life or to express their Jewishness or Judaism in any specified way. It would be reasonable to assume that this tendency was intertwined with the weakened role of the Jewish organizations in the life of young Jews. It seems that young Jews did not give a central role to the Jewish community and the Jewish community was not able to maintain it by itself either.

When commenting on the topic, Jack Wertheimer takes into account the same aspect as I do when looking at the situation of Jewish students at campuses. Most American Jews – including Jewish college students – identify as politically Left and at least concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these liberal and leftist social-political views seem to have been more visible at campuses and more in favor of college students. Wertheimer refers to Jay Michaelson – Jewish writer of the Jewish *Forward* magazine in his late thirties – who had previously written that in the academic circles and politically liberal circles, it had become very difficult to support Israel in any way. Israel had become an inconvenient subject of conversation. Wertheimer continues by bringing up that “—we simply do not know how — younger Jews who are exposed to this kind of talk on university campuses and beyond, navigate the social and political realities – and how the

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<sup>286</sup> Cohen & Kelman 2010.

hostile discourse shapes their levels of attachment to the State of Israel.”<sup>287</sup> The material about college Jews in this study is not an exhaustive sample, but it suggests that some Jewish students, such as Daniela Gerson, indeed had difficulties in discussing Israel and supporting it in any way.

The topic was also commented by a Professor of Israel Studies, Ronald Zweig, from New York University. According to Zweig, his students were “more capable of separating an emotional empathy from their political views of Israel, and [were] very aware of the problems that face Israeli society.” Zweig saw that criticism against Israeli society or policies did not automatically mean that these young Jews would have been more distant from Israel. He saw that young Jewish students were better informed about the situation, and their relationship with Israel had evolved into a more complex one instead of “blind loyalty and support.”<sup>288</sup> This suggests that there were other students like Gerson and Cara Unowsky, who understood the complexity of the issue and saw the conflict from more than one side. Zweig concluded his remarks by stating that “the relationship between engaged young American Jews and Israel is transforming itself into something new and more mature.”<sup>289</sup> In another comment on the discussion in the journal, Gordon Fellman looked forward to this as well, as he suggested that the older generation’s preference of unconditional loyalty over informed and enlightened – even if sometimes critical – engagement was “profoundly anti-intellectual.”<sup>290</sup>

To present the last sample of the discussion in *Contemporary Jewry*, I present a historical viewpoint that Bethamie Horowitz offered to the debate. She explained that generational differences in attitudes towards Israel can be understood better when taking historical context into account. For example, in the early 1980s, it was more difficult to get information about the events of the world, a smaller amount of Jews had visited Israel, and there had been no *intifadas* or suicide bombers. During the last few decades, the situation has grown increasingly complex, conflict has widened, and there has been moments of great hope and great hopelessness during the peace process.<sup>291</sup> With a better access to information and the complexity of the issue, it is understandable that the Jewish American attitude towards Israel is less unified than it was over 30 years ago.

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<sup>287</sup> Wertheimer 2010.

<sup>288</sup> Zweig 2010.

<sup>289</sup> Zweig 2010.

<sup>290</sup> Fellman 2010.

<sup>291</sup> Horowitz 2010.

## **IV Social dimensions in the life of young American Jews**

### ***1. Intermarriage and engagement to the Jewish community***

The American Jewish community's concern about the phenomenon that the younger generation was continuously and increasingly marrying non-Jews instead of Jews frequently came up in the sources of this study. It seems to have been one of the most important aspects of the general concern about how to preserve Judaism in America. In 1990, when the Jewish Population Survey showed rising intermarriage rates, the phenomenon was even called "the silent Holocaust",<sup>292</sup> which underlines the degree of anxiety that the tendency raised. It is, however, noteworthy that in nearly every aspect of the recent currents and changes in Jewish life, older Jewish leaders were more concerned than young Jewish leaders. Among these anxieties were intermarriage, young Jews' general lack of interest in Jewish life and distancing from Israel.<sup>293</sup>

Opposition against intermarriage has a long history. At least until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marrying outside faith was seen as a rejection of Jewishness. This scheme of things originated from the time when civil marriage did not exist, which meant that it was basically not possible for the partners to stay within their own, separate religious communities. When Jews married non-Jews and thus left the Jewish community, it made intermarriage a threat to Jewish survival. After the Second World War, many American rabbis felt that Jewish survival was under threat and that it would be harmful to come up with a more open attitude towards intermarriage. Some rabbis, however, felt that it did no good to the Jewish survival to regulate the personal life of American Jews more.<sup>294</sup> Still, the opposition to intermarriage stayed strong and even when the different ethnic groups in the United States became more and more similar through the 1960s, many rabbis characterized intermarriage as socially deviant and a threat to the stability of family and America. However, rabbis understood that they themselves had created the favorable circumstances for intermarriages by encouraging Jews to pursue cultural and social contacts with non-Jews. Liberal views and the idea of equality, which were common among Jewish parents in the 1960s, led to the situation in which they were not able to explain the importance

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<sup>292</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2007 b.

<sup>293</sup> Cohen 2011, 67–68.

<sup>294</sup> Berman 2009, 69–70, 72.

of endogamy to their children or to persuade them to marry other Jews.<sup>295</sup> For no doubt, this trend grew when the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew on.

An important concept to understand when talking about intermarriage is that it was not until the 1960s that Jewishness was considered a matter of choice. Before that, Jewishness was explained and defined mainly through sociology, race or religion. This turn in the understanding of Jewishness enabled a Jew to choose to consider himself or herself Jewish despite the intermarriage, which meant that intermarriage did not directly mean that the Jewish community lost a member. Looking more widely, this was a concept of something that Lila Corwin Berman calls “volitional Jewishness”. According to Berman, volitional Jewishness emerged in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it brought the possibility for an individual Jew to decide by him- or herself how to enact his or her Jewishness. This concept was useful for Jewish leaders, who wanted to take liberal views into account and to avoid setting strict boundaries to defining Jewishness. On the other hand, this concept that emphasized volition had an obvious weakness. It was basically impossible to draw a line on which personal views about Jewishness were acceptable and which were not. Nevertheless, when the concept of choosing one’s Jewishness became usual in the 1970s, Jewish leaders focused on young Jews. Their aim was to influence their decisions about Jewishness, especially concerning marriage.<sup>296</sup>

The difficulty of this concept was also addressed as late as in 2005 in an article by Ilana Sichel in *New Voices*. Sichel acknowledged that American Jews could now choose if they wanted to be Jewish and furthermore, what aspects of Jewish identity and traditions they wanted to embrace. This, Sichel mentioned, was called “dim-sum Jewishness”<sup>297</sup> by Jennifer Bleyer, the founding editor of *Heeb*. This led to a situation in which it was challenging to maintain something that could be called authentic Jewish culture. How would it be possible for American Jewish culture to “respect healthy pluralism and the tides of change without descending into either ‘anything goes’ Jewishness or the hegemony of the one ‘real’ way to be Jewish”, Sichel pondered.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Berman 2009, 144, 157, 159.

<sup>296</sup> Berman 2009, 145, 163, 166, 171–172.

<sup>297</sup> Dim sum refers to a Chinese dish which is a selection of small portions of food.

<sup>298</sup> Sichel 2005.

The Jewish community and especially Reform rabbis had trouble defending endogamy already in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>299</sup> so it is no surprise that it became even more difficult when the 21<sup>st</sup> century drew close and young Jews had an increasingly similar life compared with young non-Jews. However, something of the mutual connection between young Jews still remained. This was noticed by Lila Berman when looking at the success of JDate, an online dating service for Jews.<sup>300</sup> There was still something that made young Jews of the 21<sup>st</sup> century prefer dating other Jews in particular.

The Jewish community's concern about Jews marrying non-Jews was not groundless in the sense that intermarriage rates had indeed risen since the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Jewish Population Survey in 1990 showed that the intermarriage rate in 1990 was 31%, whereas in 1970 it had been only 8%.<sup>301</sup> In 2013, the survey by Pew Research Center showed that of all married Jews who responded to the survey, 44% were married to a non-Jewish spouse. Of those who had gotten married between 1990–1994, 46% had a non-Jewish spouse, and of those between 1995–1999, the proportion was 55%. Of those who had gotten married after 2000, a total of 58% were married to a non-Jew. As could be expected, Orthodox Jews had clearly the lowest number of intermarriages and Conservatives second lowest. The number was highest among Jews with “no denomination” and second highest among Reform Jews.<sup>302</sup> This shows that intermarriage was indeed becoming more usual, but it is a more complicated question whether it actually meant that Judaism was slowly “dying off” in America. As mentioned earlier, Shaul Magid stated that Judaism will survive, it will just look different than before. The primary reasons he gives for this are the normalization of intermarriage and the tendency of an intermarried Jew to remain in the Jewish community and to take his or her non-Jewish partner along.<sup>303</sup> However, there are some data that indicate that intermarriage causes Jews to distant from Jewish life. According to Cohen et al in 2014, the intermarried Jews in New York became more distant from Jewish life from 2002–2011. This could be seen in several aspects, such as decreasing rates of celebrating Seder, lighting

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<sup>299</sup> Berman 2009, 61–63.

<sup>300</sup> Berman 2009, 172.

<sup>301</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2007 b.

<sup>302</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 35–37.

<sup>303</sup> Magid 2013, 21.

Chanukah candles, and considering being Jewish and being part of Jewish community very important in one's life.<sup>304</sup>

The views found in *New Voices* resonate with Magid's statement.

Intermarriage was discussed especially frequently in the magazine's articles by the editors themselves. The editors of *New Voices* repeatedly criticized the efforts of the Jewish community to try to make young Jews marry Jews. Josh Nathan-Kazis, chief editor of *New Voices* by that time, wrote in 2007 that the Jewish press in America was "an echo chamber for the party line of the Jewish establishment" and it had two messages for young Jews: "first, support Israel, and second, marry a Jew".<sup>305</sup> Nathan-Kazis continued by stating that the Jewish press was unable to engage Jewish students in debate and that *New Voices* was different as it did not demand such things from Jewish students but instead made an effort to discuss and make arguments.<sup>306</sup> Nathan-Kazis and other editors of *New Voices* were in step with their Jewish peers. In 2011, Steven M. Cohen found out that young Jewish leaders, especially in the nonestablishment sector, were widely against the opposition of intermarriage. According to him, 76% of those young Jews in leadership positions in organizations or media agree that "Jews should marry whomever they fall in love with, even if not Jewish."<sup>307</sup>

*New Voices* did indeed present varying views about this topic as well. In 2003, David Axel wrote a letter to the editor where he argued that intermarriage was indeed a threat to the survival of Jewish values. In his opinion, marriage of two parents from different faiths would inevitably sacrifice something of each other's religion. He concluded the text in a sad tone, saying that the older generation's battle against intermarriage might already be lost.<sup>308</sup> In May 2006, *New Voices* looked at the topic from different angles. Amanda Milstein wrote about her views about intermarriage as a queer Jewish woman. She explained that she never had a definitive stance on topic, which was hard to understand by many of her fellow Jews. In her opinion, it was important that a potential partner understood what she said and did and appreciated her interests, which in this case meant Jewish studies and working in a Jewish magazine. This meant that probably the most suitable partner for her would be a Jew as well, but for her non-observant and non-religious friends, it was clearly old-fashioned to choose a partner based

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<sup>304</sup> Cohen et al 2014, 101–102.

<sup>305</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2007 a.

<sup>306</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2007 a.

<sup>307</sup> Cohen 2011, 73–74.

<sup>308</sup> Kochman 2003.



on religion.<sup>309</sup> Milstein's text illustrates well the difficulties of young Jews with liberal values. Even if they wanted to appreciate Jewish traditions and culture, they often ended up noticing these were not always easily compatible with contemporary American values and lifestyle.

Jewish scholars have differing views on intermarriage as well. In the *American Jewish Year Book 2014*, in which Jewish scholars commented on the Pew Research Center survey, Steven M. Cohen, who has done significant research about Jewish identity, wrote in a concerned tone how American Judaism would be in trouble in the future. According to him, the findings of the Pew Research Center's large Jewish population survey in 2013 showed that the "Jewish Middle" – in other words, non-Orthodox but affiliated Jews – will be facing difficulties within the next few decades. In Cohen's view, this was mainly due to intermarriage and a low fertility rate of about 1.7 children for non-Orthodox Jew in ages 40–59. His view was that this will lead to a situation in which Jewish institutions of non-Orthodox Jews will find it difficult to continue their work without new active members.<sup>310</sup>

Another Jewish scholar, Bethamie Horowitz, looks at the statistics from a very different angle. According to her, the process meant that the leaders of Jewish institutions had to find new ways to meet the needs of Jewish people in America. She did not see intermarriage as such a threat. Instead, the rising intermarriage rates indicated that there was positive incorporation and acceptance towards American Jews, and that intermarriage no longer meant abandoning Judaism.<sup>311</sup>

Another scholar, Stephen Sharot, a sociologist himself, categorizes Jewish sociologists into pessimists and optimists, in other words – respectively – those who saw the rising rates of intermarriage as a threat and those who saw that American Judaism will survive through the process. Steven Cohen was among the most prominent optimists in the 1980s, but in Sharot's view, and as can be seen in Cohen's comments above, Cohen has later leaned towards pessimism.<sup>312</sup> Of the other scholars presented in my study, at least Bethamie Horowitz, Debra Renee Kaufman and Shaul Magid would seem to fit in the optimist side with their positive attitudes towards changes in American Jewish culture.

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<sup>309</sup> Milstein 2006.

<sup>310</sup> Cohen 2015, 27–31.

<sup>311</sup> Horowitz 2015, 54–55.

<sup>312</sup> Sharot 2011, 160.

This discourse shows that Jewish scholars, especially the pessimists, were also part of the Jewish community that put pressure on young Jews. Some of the research about American Judaism concentrated and still concentrates especially on finding and understanding the reasons to the rising rates of intermarriage in order to change its course.<sup>313</sup> An interesting example of how Jewish scholars' views can be seen in their studies can be found in terminology. In a report about single American Jews – “uncoupled” Jews, as they call them – Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman use a term “gold standard”, coined by a Jewish studies scholar Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett. “Gold standard” refers to the in-married Jewish population, who are, according to Cohen and Kelman, “the demographic center of the Jewish institutional world and score highest on measures of conventional Jewish engagement.”<sup>314</sup> Understandably, these Jewish scholars who researched American Judaism and also were part of it themselves, expressed their substantiated opinions on topics such as this. However, it would seem reasonable that this kind of terminology might irritate young Jews who would be excluded from the group called “gold standard.” Similar remarks about the unwritten attitudes in studies about young American Jews have been done elsewhere. In the discussion about the “distancing hypothesis”, which is addressed in this study in the end of the third chapter about young Jews' views on Israel, at least two of the contributors, Ephraim Tabory and Gordon Fellman questioned the hidden attitudes behind the research about American Jews' affiliation with Israel. Fellman pointed out that there is an “unexamined assumption” that American Jews feeling connected with Israel is first and foremost a desired situation. He also criticized what he saw as the Jewish community's preference of unconditional support of Israel over informed criticism against it.<sup>315</sup>

In addition to Josh Nathan-Kazis, other editors of *New Voices* made statements about intermarriage and commented on the pressure that young Jews had in the American Jewish community. Daniela Gerson expressed in 2002 the same concern that Nathan-Kazis raised in 2007, which shows that the situation did not get better during those years:

It is time for us to recreate a Jewish youth culture in which we can take pride in our Jewish heritage and take our place at the Jewish communal table. For if we don't

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<sup>313</sup> E.g. Kadushin et al 2012, Cohen et al 2014.

<sup>314</sup> Cohen & Kelman 2008, 9, 16.

<sup>315</sup> Fellman 2010, Tabory 2010.

speaking out in our own diverse voices, the “established” Jewish community will rarely say anything we want to hear.<sup>316</sup>

In the text, Gerson expressed that young Jews had something special to give to the society. They could for example have unique insights about the situation in Israel, as they understood both sides of the conflict. Gerson’s ideas have an interesting parallel in something that Lila Corwin Berman wrote about in her study *Speaking of Jews*. Around the 1950s, Jewish leaders adopted a view that in order for Judaism to survive, Jews had to be useful to the society. In their view, Jewish usefulness meant Jewish survival.<sup>317</sup> Perhaps Gerson’s view could be seen as a statement that when young Jews could become a useful part of the society, it would benefit American Judaism in general as well. Considering the audience of *New Voices*, the reason she wrote this was probably that she wanted to encourage young Jewish students to become active in the society as Jews.

Another editor, Cara Unowsky, put it frankly in 2005: “Today, young Jews become engaged not with Judaism, but with the preservation of Judaism.” In her “Editor’s View” text in May 2005, she criticized the tendency of the Jewish community to direct young Jews to build their Jewish identity on the same things as before, mainly anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.<sup>318</sup> Unowsky seems to have indicated that young Jews were encouraged to preserve Judaism in the form which the older generations found proper, and they were not encouraged to ponder their own views and expressions of Jewishness. She wrote that in a seminar for Jewish students a woman had advertised a possibility for students to receive credits for regularly visiting Holocaust survivors. Even if the woman had stated it was about enjoying a company of an older person, Unowsky considered that it was only another attempt to instill a Holocaust-based identity in the young Jewry.<sup>319</sup> Earlier the same year, David Hein had written about same topic, commenting on the case where Prince Harry had worn a swastika armband in a costume party and was heavily criticized for it. The Simon Wiesenthal Center, an organization researching the Holocaust, had stated that he should be taken to visit Auschwitz. Hein wrote that the idea of using trips to Auschwitz as purposeful triggers for tears or a bad conscience did harm to the memory of the tragedy. He also wrote that the history of persecution and death should no longer be the basis of Jewish

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<sup>316</sup> Gerson 2002 b.

<sup>317</sup> Berman 2009, 71, 91.

<sup>318</sup> Unowsky 2005 b.

<sup>319</sup> Unowsky 2005 b.

identity.<sup>320</sup> The reason why Unowsky and Hein took a critical stand on these Holocaust-related cases was not that they would not have appreciated the memory of the victims or that they would not have cared about the legacy of the Holocaust. Instead, they evaluated critically the role that the Holocaust still had in Jewish identity and saw that it was not beneficial for the Jewish community to still concentrate on it to that degree.

It seems to have been a common opinion in *New Voices* that the Jewish community was trying to engage young Jews in the wrong way. In July 2005, a writer called Beth Ballinger, who was probably not one of the actual editors, wrote specifically about Conservative Judaism, the branch of Judaism she found her own. In her opinion, Conservative Judaism should “accommodate an ever-changing Jewish climate”, in order for her to want to go there in the future. This would mean for example being more accepting of the use of musical instruments in services and of a more joyful mood in general as she felt that “we as Jews [should not] pass all the fun on to Reform congregations”. At a more general level, her view was that “if Jewish institutions want our participation as the years go on, they must find ways to engage us”.<sup>321</sup>

As a national Jewish student magazine that, in a sense, represented all Jewish college students, *New Voices* probably had more pressure from the Jewish community – than for example *Heeb* – to engage young Jews more firmly with the Jewish community. In an interview of the founding editors of *Heeb* in *Observer* magazine, Jennifer Bleyer made clear that they did not have such pressure and did not embrace such a mission:

None of us are saying we can be the spokespeople for the young Jewish generation. — We’re certainly not trying to tell people to marry other Jews or go back to synagogue or whatever, you know—<sup>322</sup>

The article “Heeb’s Guide to a Jewish Future” in 2007 shows the way in which the topic was covered in *Heeb*. The article began by acknowledging that more than ever, Jews of the world were unsure of the future. The style of writing shows how *Heeb* did not want to take the role of an authority, but wanted to present the issue in a light tone:

Yes, everyone believes in Jewish continuity, but what sort of Jewishness should be continuing? We at Heeb are not ashamed to admit that we don’t have all the

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<sup>320</sup> Hein 2005.

<sup>321</sup> Ballinger 2005.

<sup>322</sup> Snyder 2001.

answers; we're not even sure we have some of them. But we know the questions, and, most importantly, we know who to ask.<sup>323</sup>

What then followed was an interview with four children where *Heeb* asked them questions about the future of Judaism in America and Israel, such as “What does the Lebanon War of 2006 suggest about Hezbollah’s determination to eliminate the existence of Israel?”, to which children answered something like “I like Israel because you can swim every day! It’s hot!”.<sup>324</sup> *Heeb* as a representative of liberal, young Jews was able to poke fun at the discourse about the future of Judaism. The article, however, showed that they were not oblivious of the current issues. By coming up with exact questions and combining them with funny answers from Jewish children, *Heeb* created intellectual humor. Perhaps they wanted to express through this article that they did not consider the discourse about the future of Judaism as important as it was considered in the Jewish community.

Compared with *Heeb*, the “Editor’s View” text by Melissa Harvis Renny, who worked as the chief editor of *New Voices* in 2003–2004, shows how the editors of *New Voices* clearly had pressure from the Jewish community. Harvis Renny explained how the key words to use with potential funders were “continuity” and “engagement”, which basically meant promoting young Jews to marry other young Jews in order to have more Jewish babies, and promoting Jewish traditions so that the younger generation would not abandon them. She strongly opposed the idea that the magazine should work more as an engagement tool and adapt better to the wishes of the funders in order to just gain more funding.<sup>325</sup> This seems to have been an issue with which *New Voices* had to struggle continuously: how to raise and promote the new, differing voices of young Jews when that was not what the Jewish community and the funders wanted to hear.

It seems clear that young American Jews disliked it when the Jewish community tried to engage them and did not appreciate their own views and versions of expressing their Jewishness. Samuel Heilman, in his article in the American Jewish Year Book 2014, put the tendencies of young American Jews in context. He pointed out that young Jews just acted like non-Jewish young people in America. When looking at all Americans, the younger generation was less religious than the older. “As long as Jews are integrated with Americans like

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<sup>323</sup> jessie 2007 j.

<sup>324</sup> jessie 2007 j.

<sup>325</sup> Harvis Renny 2004.

themselves, they will reflect the religious trends and affiliations of America.” The only exception were young Orthodox Jews, who understood this and thus intentionally distinguished themselves from American culture through their appearance and lifestyle.<sup>326</sup>

In an article by Charles Kadushin and others in *Contemporary Jewry* in 2012 about the degree of integration of young American Jews, it was found out that young Jews were about as likely as other young Americans to have friends of the same religion. In that sense, they were not any more or any less excluded from the surrounding culture than for example Protestant or Catholic young Americans. In the article, it was concluded that excluding Haredi Jews, contemporary Jews were not “socially isolated from the rest of America”. In addition, the settings where young adult American Jews met their spouses was generally similar with other groups, although Jews found Jewish partners proportionally more often online, through such websites as JDate.<sup>327</sup>

It seems that the majority of young Jews were integrated in American culture and it felt problematic for them to reverse the process by for example supporting endogamy. This might explain their difficulties in pleasing the older generations in the community. The writers in this sub-chapter appreciated Jewishness and were not against the attempt of preserving it in general. The common opinion just seems to have been that the Jewish community tried to promote these attempts in the wrong way. Young Jews criticized the old ways of maintaining Jewish identity. They did not find these ways as significant as they used be, but wanted to find new ways in order for their generation to be proud of their tradition.

There indeed were attempts by younger generation of American Jews to make young Jews understand the significance of Jewishness to them. They might not have done it in exactly the way the Jewish community wanted, but instead did it in the way they found reasonable. In 2005, Josh Nathan-Kazis wrote a longish article about a band called The Balkan Beat Box and especially JDub Records, who had previously signed Matisyahu, the Hasidic reggae star. Nathan-Kazis wrote that JDub Records was a part of a widespread effort to change young Jews’ relationships with their Jewishness. Aaron Bisman, the founder of this non-profit record label, said:

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<sup>326</sup> Heilman 2015, 48.

<sup>327</sup> Kadushin et al 2012, 176, 180, 182.

I don't care if people become religious, or join a synagogue, or donate, or whatever. I care that they think that Judaism matters, in whatever way.<sup>328</sup>

This resonates also with Daniela Gerson's words, "It is time for us to recreate a Jewish youth culture in which we can take pride in our Jewish heritage."<sup>329</sup> In the conclusion of the compiled work *The New Jewish Leaders*, Jack Wertheimer highlighted that one of the key characteristics of the new generation of Jewish Americans was that it was meaningfulness, not obligation, that drew them into Jewish activities. They did not feel obliged to participate in the Jewish communal life in ways that their predecessors participated, and they did not feel obliged to express their Jewishness in any specific or fixed way. Instead, they enjoyed getting meaningful experiences that some Jewish organizations or groups – along with any non-Jewish organizations or groups – were able to give them.<sup>330</sup> The work that JDub Records did was widely acknowledged among other groups in this compiled work about young Jewish leaders. Bisman's statement that he wanted Judaism to matter to young Jews, "in whatever way", shows how younger American Jews were open towards personal expressions of Jewishness and Bisman among others wanted Jewishness to still have significance to young Jews.

As mentioned before, of Jews aged 18–29 in 2013, 96% were proud of their Jewishness. When asked how important being Jewish was for them, 33% found it very important and 44% somewhat important. Of the same age group, 69% had strong sense of belonging to Jewish people.<sup>331</sup> In a report of "uncoupled" American Jews, Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman stated that also single young Jewish adults, who were relatively less involved in for example synagogues, were as often proud of being Jewish as married Jews. Cohen and Kelman continued by suggesting that even if single Jews demonstrated relatively low levels of measurable Jewish behaviour, this was mainly because they were not able to find suitable communal institutions to participate in, and it did not mean that they would not have had interest in being Jewish.<sup>332</sup> All in all, even if intermarriage rates caused anxiety within the older generation within the Jewish community, these statistics from the Pew Research Center survey cannot be seen as vastly threatening. If still 77% of young Jews found it important to be Jewish and a total of 96% were proud of their Jewishness, and considering the views presented by

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<sup>328</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2005 a.

<sup>329</sup> Gerson 2002 b.

<sup>330</sup> Wertheimer 2011 b, 324.

<sup>331</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 51–52.

<sup>332</sup> Cohen & Kelman 2008, 16.

for example the editors of *New Voices*, it does seem that Jewishness still had significance to young American Jews and they were not going to abandon it. Instead, young American Jews will probably embrace it in new ways and take it to new directions.

## **2. Sexuality and gender**

Interpretations of Judaism by American Jewish theologians have traditionally been positive towards the body and sexual relations, at least within marriage. In addition, traditional Jewish cultures particularly emphasized the importance of female sexual satisfaction in marriage. The positive attitude towards healthy sexuality was proudly pushed forward especially considering that Christianity was seen as repressing sexuality. In the 1970s, the films of Woody Allen pictured a stereotype of the sexually nervous Jew, which along with other similar impressions made Jewish culture seem self-critical in its sexual identity. Later in the 1980s and 1990s these stereotypes were attacked in various works, such as the television series *Seinfeld* and works of female Jewish writers.<sup>333</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems that the young generation had quite a similar stance towards sexuality as their age mates. They could treat the subject without the ballast of former stereotypes. A negative attitude towards sexuality could not really be seen in the sources of this study.

In the report of their survey in 2013, Pew Research Center stated that Jews were strong supporters of gay rights. Consistently in every aspect, Jews were more positive towards gay rights than the general public. Republican Jews were less accepting, but also they tended to be more accepting than non-Jewish Republicans. The Ultra-Orthodox Jews showed quite a similar stance as white Evangelicals. In total, according to the survey, 82% of all American Jews said that homosexuality should be accepted by the society. In ages 18–29, the percentage was 89% and in ages 30–49, it was 80%.<sup>334</sup> Both groups include Jews who were young or young adults during the time frame of this study. The survey showed that the young generation was increasingly more accepting towards homosexuality.

The style of *Heeb* made it very clear what kind of stance it had towards sexuality in all its forms. It did not have to underline this positive stance to its audience, which probably agreed with it already. *Heeb* did, however, interview

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<sup>333</sup> Biale 2005, 259–266; Fishman 2005, 247.

<sup>334</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 101–102.



influential figures in these circles, such as gay activist Larry Kramer. In another article, they interviewed one of the leaders of the gay Jewish community in Jerusalem. The author of the article called the opponents of this group “Jerusalem’s holy homophobes”.<sup>335</sup> The use of such a sardonic term indicates that *Heeb* was definitely on the gay community’s side.

There was not much written about sexuality in general in *New Voices*, but they did write for example about the position of gay Jews in various communities and situations. The position that gay Jews had depended much on the branch of Judaism. In 1992, Reconstructionist Judaism accepted full inclusion of gay people in all aspects of Jewish life. Reform Judaism accepted same-sex civil marriage in 1997, and in 2000 it became allowed for the Reform rabbis to decide for themselves whether they wanted to perform same-sex ceremonies. The Conservative movement approved same-sex marriage ceremonies in 2012. Orthodox Judaism is the only one that has not formally given acceptance to most gay rights.<sup>336</sup>

In 2003, *New Voices* published a praising article by Sara Spielman about a documentary film called “Trembling Before G-d” and its maker, Sandi Dubowski. The film was a groundbreaking work about gay Jews in the Orthodox world – basically none of them openly gay – and their difficulties in combining these two identities in a community that did not accept their orientation. Since its release in 2001, Dubowski had toured in screenings of the film in various communities, campuses and synagogues, which created a movement that raised awareness of the issue in the Ultra-Orthodox world. This, of course, caused strong opposition as well, but Dubowski seemed content with the fact that at least the topic was finally discussed and not ignored in silence.<sup>337</sup> Spielman was clearly on Dubowski’s side and appreciated the work he had done to help gay Jews. For example, at the end of the article, there was a link to the film’s website. It is clear that the sympathies of *New Voices* was on the side of gay people, whose situation was getting better due to the film.

In October 2004, nearly 200 students of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois gathered to an event in which two gay veterans of Israeli Defense Forces discussed their experiences in the service. The event also included a screening of the film “Yossi and Jagger”, which was about being gay in the

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<sup>335</sup> Liz 2009 c (2007).

<sup>336</sup> Powers [2012].

<sup>337</sup> Spielman 2003.

Israeli army. Megan Brown wrote a report of the event for *New Voices*. Along with other student groups, a new group of Jewish LGBT students organized the event and according to the report, it was a success and raised awareness of the issue.<sup>338</sup> These examples show that there was activism on the issue on campuses and that *New Voices* wanted to give publicity to it.

Feminism, however, was not very much seen in the sources in the time frame of this study. It most likely does not mean that feminism would have been opposed, it just might have not been a current issue during those years. The scholar Sylvia Barack Fishman wrote in 2005 that it could be argued that as gender issues were largely solved in the American Jewish culture, it had reached a “postfeminist state”. The attitude of American Jews towards women was more liberal than in other American ethnic groups.<sup>339</sup> Jewish feminism surely still existed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a Jewish feminist magazine *Lilith*, which was founded already in 1973, and it was active through the early 2000s as well. A study about *Lilith* could elucidate the picture of Jewish feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century more than the present work. However, some activism could be seen in the sources of this study as well, as the opening article of the *New Voices* February 2006 issue by Avi Mermelstein shows. The issue, as well as the article, was titled “This is Not a Gender Issue”. In the text, Mermelstein called for equal rights for everyone in the Jewish community:

—what is the worth of an American Jewish community that has loosened gender restrictions in some clergies, but leaves most lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Jews compartmentalizing their identities?<sup>340</sup>

Mermelstein’s message was that even if the struggle for equality was mostly behind, there was still work to do with the rights of many minorities. He acknowledged the history of Jews as an oppressed minority and stated that especially now when there were no longer such problems for Jews, they should be careful not to let down various minorities in their own community.<sup>341</sup>

*New Voices* wrote about gender minorities as well. The magazine reported in April 2003 in a positive tone about the first transgender rabbinical student, Reuben Zellman:

Of all the nice Jewish girls who have become nice Jewish boys, none has ever tried to become a rabbi. Until now.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Brown 2004.

<sup>339</sup> Fishman 2005, 239.

<sup>340</sup> Mermelstein 2006.

<sup>341</sup> Mermelstein 2006.

<sup>342</sup> *New Voices* 2003 b.

Another case involving Jewish transgender students was an occasion in a Jewish program house in Wesleyan University in 2006. This community, which was known for its tolerance, organized a service in which they decided to use *mechitza*, the barrier that was traditionally used in Orthodox synagogues to separate the sitting areas of men and women. This was done as an experiment and a reminder of the diversity of Jewish tradition that was not always seen at Wesleyan. The experiment, however, raised criticism by many. A senior student, who was called “Z” in the article and who was a member of both the Jewish and transgender communities, said that the arrangement made them feel excluded from the service. According to Z, there were a lot of queer Jews on campus and they had previously organized a queer-themed Shabbat service, in which they took the comments and suggestions of other participants better into account. Z’s view seems to have been that the *mechitza* experiment could have been done with more caution.<sup>343</sup>

Concerning sexuality, young Jews at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were mainly open-minded. *Heeb* published various provocative articles about themes around sex so its stance on the topic was clear. *New Voices* showed various opinions and seemed to try to enlighten young Jews on understanding them. Both magazines had mainly a young audience, so one would think that they did not need to especially defend their positive stances towards sexuality and equality in general. This was especially true concerning *Heeb*, which main audience was urban and liberal Jews. *New Voices*, however, featured articles that took a stand on topics, such as attitudes to homosexuality in Conservative and Orthodox Judaism.

One of those articles that showed opinions about sexuality in *New Voices* was about the abstinence education within Orthodox Judaism. Promoting abstinence from premarital sex tended to be something that was done by evangelical Christian groups, such as True Love Waits, and it was not considered a very Jewish phenomenon. However, the Orthodox Union had launched a new campaign in 2007 to promote abstinence among young Jews. The writer of the article, Marissa Brostoff, found it difficult to understand such activity, as it was an unusual stance in Judaism and more common in the American Christian sphere. The rabbis Brostoff referred to in the article did not exactly approve of the action either – even if they formally opposed sex before marriage – but instead they were

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<sup>343</sup> Miller 2006.

more concerned about the well-being and safety of young Jews, whether they engaged in sex at a young age or not.<sup>344</sup> The article hints at several patterns of thought. As it was traditionally in Jewish culture, sexuality was not principally a negative aspect of life, and younger generation appreciated this. In addition, it was seen as a worrying trend when groups within Judaism adopted such views from conservative Christianity. Interestingly, according to a survey near the end of the first decade of the 2000s, “very few” Jews ages 21–45 disapproved of premarital sex and 95% were sexually active, which is a rather high amount, as the second biggest religious group, Mainline Protestants, were at 78%.<sup>345</sup> These statistics also hint that young Jewish adults comparatively had a very positive attitude towards sexuality.

The positive attitude towards sexuality could also be seen in *New Voices* article about BDSM (bondage-domination-sado-masochism) in 2005. In the article, Josh Nathan-Kazis tried to find out why it seemed that especially Jews were into the BDSM lifestyle and also, were there any rules or reasons in Jewish law that would have formally prohibited such activity. There is a large selection of passages about sexual behavior in these texts, according to the article, but none of them actually speak about bondage or role-playing. Nathan-Kazis interviewed two BDSM enthusiasts, who were also more or less observant Jews. One of them, Vivienne Kramer, defined herself as “a bisexual Jewish feminist who’s into SM”. Nathan-Kazis had approached a few rabbis as well to ask about the topic but they refused to answer and considered the questions insulting. One explanation for the Jews’ interest in BDSM was that Jews were traditionally raised “to question and to explore”, as Kramer put it. In the end, the article was fairly positive and understanding towards the phenomenon.<sup>346</sup>

*New Voices* gave positive coverage to BDSM, while *Heeb* published an article about polyamorous Jews in 2007. True to form, *Heeb* included satire of the Jewish community in this article as well. The article began with the familiar observation that the Jewish community wanted Jews to marry Jews and was also concerned of the rising divorce rates. Then the author asked whether the Jewish community would not “be pleased to know that some Jews yearn to be in as many Jewish relationships as possible... at the same time?”<sup>347</sup> The humor of the phrase

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<sup>344</sup> Brostoff 2007.

<sup>345</sup> Fishman et al 2011, 187.

<sup>346</sup> Nathan-Kazis 2005 b.

<sup>347</sup> jessie 2007 a.

comes from the fact that *Heeb* understood the Jewish community's concern and was well aware that most of the Jewish leaders who opposed intermarriage, probably also opposed any other orientations that were not traditionally heterosexual.

These articles about BDSM and polyamory indicate that both magazines, *Heeb* and *New Voices*, were liberal and open towards uncommon orientations. It is likely that with this they reflected the general opinion of their readership, young and educated Jews, who were more likely than previous generations to accept such activities. It would seem reasonable that the editors of the magazines wanted to publish these kinds of articles because they wanted to be open and inclusive, and they wanted their readership to be open and inclusive as well. The latter was probably more true concerning *New Voices*, whereas *Heeb* would seem to have been both edited and read by like-minded people.

The attitude that *Heeb* had to sexuality was very open, even provocative. It could be seen for example in the interviews they did with Jewish artists or celebrities who had such an attitude themselves. The very first issue of *Heeb* in 2002 featured two interviews, one with Jewish the hip-hop artist Paul Barman and another with the female musician and performer Peaches. Paul Barman was a provocative Jewish rapper, whose lyrics had a lot of Jewish influence and references. He had not had a religious background but was embraced by the Jewish community. The interviewer Liz admitted that her favorites among Barman's lyrics were the ones about his "sexual conquests". Barman answered that those lyrics worked so well because everyone could relate to the topic. In one of his concerts, Barman had thrown *Hanukkah gelt* (chocolate coins) to the crowd, except these coins were not chocolate but "gold coin" condoms.<sup>348</sup> The interview with Peaches concentrated on her music and career, and not much on her Jewishness, even if she had been born to a Jewish family. Peaches' music and live shows were described colorfully and it became clear that she was a daring performer and her show was erotically charged.<sup>349</sup> These interviews show how *Heeb* was forming their style as a trendy Jewish magazine. The editors of *Heeb* picked daring artists, known for their openness about sexuality, and interviewed them about their Jewishness and about their provocative performances.

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<sup>348</sup> Liz 2002.

<sup>349</sup> Neuman 2002.

In October 2005, *Heeb* published its ninth issue titled “Sex Issue”. The issue featured a cover picture of Jewish comedian Sarah Silverman posing naked behind a sheet with a hole in it, which refers to the myth that Ultra-Orthodox Jews would only have sex through a hole in a sheet. The selection of articles in the issue made it clear that *Heeb* was not afraid of tackling sexual themes. Rachel Shukert’s bold article about oral sex, titled “Bigmouth Strikes Again”<sup>350</sup> – a reference to a song by The Smiths – is a clear example of this. The Sex Issue also featured an article with a selection of ten scenes in the Hebrew Bible that involved sex.<sup>351</sup> The article was titled “In a Biblical Sense”<sup>352</sup> and it opened by presenting the Hebrew Bible as “the sexiest ancient religious text” and praising how sexy “our patriarchs and matriarchs” were.<sup>353</sup> The tone of the article does not seem mocking. Instead, it presented the Hebrew Bible, the core text of Judaism, in a funny way, not in a ridiculing way. The tone is not to say that the stories in the Hebrew Bible are foolish or strange. Instead, the text indicates – perhaps in an ironic way, though – that Jews should be proud of their “sexy” and clever ancestors, who tempted kings and queens in order to swindle them. This is a great example of how young Jews combined their positive attitude towards sexuality and their pride in being Jewish. These articles also reveal something about *Heeb* as a magazine and its mission. References to popular culture, myths and slang idioms and the clever humor that was created with these references show that *Heeb* wanted to be seen as an aware and even, in a sense, sophisticated magazine. They built an image of an aware, Jewish young adult who knew both popular culture and Jewish culture.

### **3. Jewish food culture, kosher and vegetarianism**

The debate and rise of awareness about vegetarianism and ethical eating seem to have been current topics at the beginning of the third millennium. *Super Size Me*, a Morgan Spurlock documentary film about the health effects of McDonald’s food, was released in 2004. *Fast Food Nation*, a book about the fast food industry, was published in 2001 and adapted into a film in 2006. These two titles were mentioned in the *Heeb* articles about topics around food and ethical eating, so it seems that they had their part in bringing the issue out during the time. Kosher

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<sup>350</sup> gwoo 2005.

<sup>351</sup> In the web archive there is only an excerpt of the original article and no pictures can be seen.

<sup>352</sup> The idiom “know someone in the Biblical sense” means that one had sexual intercourse with someone.

<sup>353</sup> jessie 2005 a.

food's role in the discourse about ethical eating and as a part of Jewish tradition was brought up in some of the articles, especially in *New Voices*.

The roots of the contemporary status of kosher in American Jewish culture are in the Pittsburgh Platform meeting in 1885. In the meeting, a group of rabbis were to discuss guiding principles for Reform Judaism. One of those principles was that the laws regulating diet were no more meaningful, but instead even harmful for the spiritual life of Reform Jews.<sup>354</sup> Later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the usual diet of Jewish immigrants could be called “kosher style”. It was a commonplace to keep kosher at home but eat non-kosher food in restaurants in order to assimilate into the society and, in other words, to become American. As an example, eating Chinese food was considered urbane and sophisticated, which made it tempting in the minds of urban – mainly New York – Jews who wanted to assimilate and be, indeed, urbane and sophisticated. These Jews looked for Jewish tastes even if they were not following the kosher laws. The same pattern could be seen in the restaurants as well. In kosher-style delis, dairy and meat had their own display case and counter, but they could be eaten together at the same table.<sup>355</sup>

As before, keeping kosher seems to still have had cultural significance for the American Jewish community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it was by no means an essential rule that everyone followed. No more than around one out of five American Jews kept kosher at home, according to the report of Pew Research Center about the beliefs and practices of American Jews in 2013. The number was slightly higher among the younger generation, around 28%. However, the percentage was again smaller among Jews with college degree or some studies in college, between 16–22%. Among those with a high school diploma or less education the number was 41%.<sup>356</sup> In terms of the significance of traditional Jewish food, 15% of Jews aged 18–29 years said that eating Jewish food was one of the essentials of Jewish identity.<sup>357</sup> When looking at the denominations, 92% of Orthodox, 31% of Conservative and 7% of Reform Jews kept kosher at home.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Kraemer 2009, 138; Sarna 2004, 147–149.

<sup>355</sup> Kraemer 2009, 139–144; Diner 2001, 185. Briefly explained, kosher laws (known also as *kashrut*) forbid the consumption of several varieties of food. These include certain species of animals (such as pig), meat that is not slaughtered according to *kashrut* and blood of mammals or birds. Another key regulation is that milk products and meat products should not be combined. For more information, see e.g. the website *My Jewish Learning*.

<sup>356</sup> The statistics about education include Jews of all ages, not only the young generation.

<sup>357</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 57.

<sup>358</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 77.

This resonates with the Pittsburgh Platform statement, which separated Reform Judaism from Conservative and Orthodox.

Kosher as a topic was tackled in several articles in *New Voices* during the time frame of this study. Some young Jews found it meaningful to eat mainly kosher food, even if they were not strictly keeping kosher. In *New Voices* in 2005, Amanda Milstein wrote about her “kosher quest”, in other words, her attempts to mainly keep kosher even if she knew she would occasionally eat non-kosher food like “decent pizza” in non-kosher pizzerias. Milstein reflected on her experiences as a worker at secular Jewish summer camps, where one of the workers intentionally mixed up the milk and meat silverware for fun, and as a “Kosher Kop”, whose job was to make sure that kosher and non-kosher food never mixed in one of the university cafeterias, which was meant to have a kosher side. In the end, she felt that her attempts to find kosher food had led her to “interesting Jewish experiences”.<sup>359</sup> Milstein’s text gives interesting examples of the ways in which kosher laws were treated among young American Jews. Her conclusion seems to be that even if one does not always keep kosher, for example by eating decent pizza, acknowledging the kosher laws and occasionally eating kosher food could be a meaningful experience for a young Jew.

The case of another Jewish student, Aaron Rotenberg, is more unusual. He turned to omnivorism after being a vegetarian for two and half years, a decision that coincided with the beginning of his studies in Yeshiva University, which is a Modern Orthodox institution. In order to gain more understanding on the topic, he enrolled in the course about *shchita*, ritual slaughter. Completing the course allowed the participants to be certified as a *shochet*, in other words, to gain a rabbinic permission to slaughter birds. In the article, Rotenberg explained what the course consisted of and concluded that after participating the course, he felt more confident eating meat, as he knew the process better. He slowly got used to witnessing the death of the birds slaughtered during the course. Instead, he was more disturbed by the bad shape in which some of the animals arrived and felt that their treatment was worse than their death.<sup>360</sup> Rotenberg’s text indicates that he was probably an Orthodox Jew and kept kosher. His story suggests that he was an ethically aware eater: first being a vegetarian and later giving that up, but with the hunger to know and understand the process that his food has gone through.

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<sup>359</sup> Milstein 2005.

<sup>360</sup> Rotenberg 2005.



There was some debate about the coverage of vegetarianism between the editors of *New Voices* and one of their readers, Sharon K. Greene, in 2004 and 2005. In June 2004, Greene wrote a reply to a light-hearted article about fish and kosher laws that was published in the latest *New Voices* issue.<sup>361</sup> In that article, according to Greene, the writer Miriam Felton-Dansky indicated that animals were meant to be the food of the people. In addition to this, Greene pointed out a detail in another article where the author wrote about an annoying vegetarian person she had met. Greene acknowledged the fact that the article by Felton-Dansky was written in a light tone, but still wanted to promote a view that questioned the very existence of meat in the Jewish dinner table. Due to these two cases which Greene interpreted as “rather hostile” toward vegetarian readers, Greene strongly suggested that *New Voices* should publish an article about the relationship between Judaism and vegetarianism.<sup>362</sup>

Greene wrote to *New Voices* again in January 2005. Again, she criticized *New Voices* for being anti-vegetarian and demanded them to publish an article on Jewish vegetarianism. This time her text was a reply to an article by Aaron Sussman, who criticized PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), which he saw had shrouded their criticism against Israel in pointing out mistreatment of animals especially in Israel and kosher slaughterhouses. PETA had also launched a campaign in which the treatment of chickens and the treatment of the Holocaust victims were compared, which Sussman thought was tasteless. Sussman later answered to Greene’s reply in a diplomatic tone. His main message was that much of his text was a satire, he did not have “grievances against vegetarians”, as Greene had accused him of having, and that he would also be delighted to see a pro-vegetarian Opinion text published in *New Voices*. Concerning PETA’s possible political agendas, Sussman’s view was that he would appreciate if PETA posed valid and open criticism against Israel, instead of provocative comparisons between the treatment of animals and humans.<sup>363</sup>

Vegetarianism was discussed in *New Voices* in 2004 and 2005 and Sharon Greene accused the magazine of having been anti-vegetarian. However, the texts that Greene interpreted as being against vegetarianism were mostly written in a light tone, so it is questionable whether there really was a trend of considering

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<sup>361</sup> The original article, “Lox et Veritas: The Truth about Fish and Kashrut”, is not available in the archive.

<sup>362</sup> Kochman 2004 a.

<sup>363</sup> Kochman 2005 a.

meat as an essential part of the diet of Jewish students. The debate around the topic shows that Jewish students were aware of the topic, probably like their non-Jewish counterparts. However, bringing kosher slaughterhouses and Israel into the discussion gave it a Jewish tone and showed that kosher and also Israel were meaningful topics for Jewish students.

Some material about ethical eating could be found in *Heeb* as well, and their stance towards the topic seems more clear. In 2007, *Heeb* interviewed Peter Singer, a known Australian philosopher and activist of ethical eating with a Jewish background. Elliot Ratzman discussed Singer's work on the subject, his background and ethical eating in general with Singer. Singer had just recently published a new book, *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* with another activist Jim Mason. Ratzman suggested that the usual view in mainstream Judaism is that animals are treated ethically when slaughtered according to kosher laws, but Singer disagreed and said that the video he saw of a kosher slaughterhouse was "one of the most shocking videos he had ever seen". The video was from the largest kosher slaughterhouse in the United States, AgriProcessors in Iowa. It showed that the death of the animals was far from swift and humane, as Singer had understood it should traditionally be.<sup>364</sup> *Heeb's* decision to interview a character like Singer indicates that its aim was to provoke thoughts and bring critical voices forward. It is clear that *Heeb* wanted to keep the viewpoint in Judaism, as Singer's Jewish background and kosher slaughterhouses came up in the discussion. The article seems to offer a conclusion that when comparing kosher and vegetarianism, the latter is clearly the more ethical choice. In a way, that brings into question the place of kosher as a part of ethical life in the modern world.

If *Heeb* magazine interviewed Peter Singer and in that way promoted views of ethical eating, it also showed the other side of the debate through satire. In the *Urban Kvetch* section of the issue number 10 in 2006, Paul Scheer complained about people who had seen *Super Size Me* or read *Fast Food Nation* and talked about them to him while he was having a meal in a fast food restaurant:

I just want to eat my burger. I don't care about the rat feces inside it or how the cow was executed to make it.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> jessie 2007 b. The article is credited to "jessie", but in the text it says that Elliot Ratzman was the interviewer.

<sup>365</sup> *Heeb* 2010 d (2006).

The general style of *Urban Kvetch* texts and the disgusting way Scheer wrote about the burgers, for example calling one a “maggot bacon cheeseburger”, suggest that the text was probably half truth and half satire. It is hard to imagine a strong, honest opponent of ethical food activism to write about the topic in such a way.

As can be seen in the *Urban Kvetch* by Paul Scheer and the interview with Peter Singer, *Heeb* both satirized and promoted the awareness about ethical eating. Somewhat the same can be said about *New Voices*. The magazine did publish light-hearted articles on the topics but also performed as a forum for a discussion about vegetarianism. In addition, the magazine published articles where young Jews reflected personally and honestly about keeping kosher and eating vegetarian. This suggests that at least Jewish students and urban Jewish readers of *Heeb* were ethically aware people. This view is supported also in David G. Myers’ article in *Commentary* about the “hipster Jews”, the young generation of Jews who identified with the style of *Heeb*. According to Myers, part of the image of these hipster Jews was to be environmentally conscious, which links to ethical eating as well.<sup>366</sup> This cannot, however, be seen as a trend of only Jewish hipsters, or Jewish young Americans in general. The sources do not indicate that it would specifically be the duty of Jewish people to be ethically aware, or that the Jewishness of young American Jews would especially be the reason for their ethical choices. It would make more sense to see this as a larger trend among the young generation of Americans, in which young Jews felt reasonable to join.

In addition to the discussions about kosher and vegetarianism, in the sources of this study, there were repeatedly references to the centeredness of eating in the Jewish culture. *Heeb*’s way to acknowledge the central role of eating in Jewish life can be seen in a comment about eating Hash Brownies, which are brownies with cannabis in them: according to Joshua Neuman, there may not be more Jewish a culinary experience than “eating to get high.”<sup>367</sup> Even though Jewish eating traditions were appreciated and joked about in this way, the texts in these magazines also raised critical voices about the negative aspects, like diseases and eating disorders, that these traditions have possibly caused.

In 2002, three young female students wrote short, subjective texts for *New Voices* about their relationship with food and Jewish eating traditions. Amy

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<sup>366</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>367</sup> joshua neuman 2007 a.

Burghardt wrote about her grandparents and the way they expressed their love to their granddaughter by feeding her. Burghardt seemed happy and thankful for the love that was expressed through giving more and more food at a family dinner. She explained how she now understood that food was more than “filling your belly”, it was about family, connections and love. Lianne Elias had some similar thoughts, but her text was more about her body image. She wrote that her body image was mainly negative, even though at the same time she understood that she looked better than she occasionally felt. She said that she had a healthy appetite as a child and she was taught that food was important thing in life and it “encourages joy in times of sorrow”. A turning point was her time at a kibbutz in Israel when she was 15 years old. She faced ridiculing and ignoring by the Israeli boys as she was not as skinny as they expected all the American girls to be.<sup>368</sup>

The third writer, Oriana M. Korin had a different viewpoint. In the text, she wrote that before college she used to be a “zaftig Jewish girl”, not thin nor athletic, but instead “spirited, intelligent and popular”. That changed in college, where she noticed that if being Jewish was the second best quality, the best was being thin. Korin had begun exercising the summer before college and soon did it daily and neurotically. She also started, in her own words, a “semi-starvation diet”. She lost weight strikingly, which caused concern in her family and led to force-feeding, which then led to binge eating and purging. Korin’s statement seems to be that eating disorders were a difficult issue for the Jewish community because of the centrality of food in Jewish life. She wrote that in her experience:

—Jewish mothers don’t know how to battle eating disorders because body image is such a non-existent part of the Jewish tradition.<sup>369</sup>

However, she concluded her text by saying that she had learned to cope with the issue better and that her Jewishness had taught her that “in order to live well, I have to love myself and be healthy.”<sup>370</sup> It becomes clear that Korin saw that there were problems in facing eating disorders in the Jewish community. Still, she did not denounce her Jewish heritage but turned it into a positive force helping her in her situation. The stories of these writers are one example of how young Jewish women felt about the stresses of appearance and eating disorders. Such issues are obviously shared by young women of all backgrounds, not only Jews, but these examples show that in some cases, Jewish traditions affected these issues.

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<sup>368</sup> New Voices 2002 a.

<sup>369</sup> New Voices 2002 a.

<sup>370</sup> New Voices 2002 a.

# V Is it cool to be a Jew?

## 1. Cool Jewishness and hipster Judaism

In informal language, something or someone being “cool” means that it is either very good, stylish, positive or somehow confident in a calm manner. As the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* says: the word is – informally – “used to show that you admire or approve of something because it is fashionable, attractive and often different.”<sup>371</sup> It can also mean that a person is:

—calm and confident in a way that lacks respect for other people, but makes people admire you as well as disapprove.<sup>372</sup>

As my sources present informal ways of writing, and they are written by young people, I find it reasonable to also draw upon the definition of the website *Urban Dictionary*. *Urban Dictionary* is a web community in which the users can write their own unofficial definitions of a term. These definitions can be liked or disliked by other users, which make them more or less approved. Some of the most popular entries define “cool” as follows:

An adjective referring to something that is very good, stylish, or otherwise positive. It is among the most common slang terms used in today’s world.<sup>373</sup>

[Cool] has come to mean anything popular.<sup>374</sup>

These definitions were written in 2003 and 2005. They show that even if the term previously had a more specific meaning and tone, it was used rather vaguely in the early 2000s.

According to several sources, which are presented later in this sub-chapter, it seems obvious that there was a trend that could be called “cool Jewishness” during the the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lisa Alcalay Klug, the author of *Cool Jew – The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe*, suggested in an interview on QTV, a program of CBC Radio in Canada, that the process of Jewishness becoming cool began when *Heeb* was founded in 2001.<sup>375</sup> As I mentioned earlier in the sub-chapter about Jewishness in *Heeb*, Jennifer Bleyer, a 25-year-old Jewish New Yorker, decided to found *Heeb*, a magazine for cool Jews, when she noticed that a vast proportion of her cool friends were Jews.

*Heeb* was self-assertive of its reputation as a cool magazine. This could be seen for example in an opening text by Jennifer Bleyer in the third issue in 2003.

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<sup>371</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary [2015].

<sup>372</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary [2015].

<sup>373</sup> Ainolketta 2005.

<sup>374</sup> ophelia 2003.

<sup>375</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

The text was an emotional obituary for Jonathan Neuman, a member of the editorial board of *Heeb*, who died of leukemia in the summer 2002 at the age of 22. Bleyer mentioned in the text how *Heeb* had got a lot of feedback about its coolness. Some gave the makers regards to tell how cool they were, whereas others had “slapped” them, as Bleyer wrote, for trying to be cool. After that, Bleyer stated: “In all honesty, ‘coolness’ is not something we’re after—but we know it when we see it —”. Then she continued to talk about Neuman’s character:

—he was innately cool, cool by being utterly good to himself and to others, and of knowing the importance of fun. His coolness had nothing to do with ego or image, and everything to do with being absolutely, genuinely, unreservedly real.<sup>376</sup>

Bleyer wrote about her first image of Neuman at the shoot for a fashion spread of the first issue of *Heeb*. The event was like a party, everyone drank Manischewitz – a traditional wine drink in Jewish events – and danced to *Hava Nagila*, famous Israeli folk song that is usually related to Jewish celebrations. Neuman wore a kippah and a “nerdy” suit and was flirting with all the girls. Bleyer concluded the text by saying that Neuman “reminded us what being cool is really about”.<sup>377</sup>

Bleyer’s text seems to show that even if *Heeb*’s style was provocative or ironic, its makers honestly cared about the members of their community and were not afraid to show it. In that sense, being cool did not mean being ignorant of things that mattered, but instead, as Bleyer put it, being utterly good to oneself and to others and knowing the importance of fun. Years later, when *Heeb* suspended its print edition in 2010, Joshua Neuman, who became the chief editor after Bleyer left, stated that *Heeb* was never about making Jewishness “cool”, but about making Jewish fun.<sup>378</sup> It seems then that this was the general attitude in the magazine during its whole existence.

In several instances, it has been suggested that the success of the Hasidic reggae star Matisyahu around 2005 had a significant role in making Jewishness cool. *Heeb* interviewed Matisyahu in February 2004. In the archive, there is only an excerpt from the original article, which concentrates on his musical background. Still, the excerpt makes it clear that Matisyahu (born Matthew Miller in 1980) had a Jewish background. He had spent a year studying in *yeshiva*, a Jewish institution to study traditional Jewish texts, and he kept kosher.<sup>379</sup> Shaul Magid places Matisyahu as the peak in the continuity from the Klezmer revival in

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<sup>376</sup> Jennifer 2003.

<sup>377</sup> Jennifer 2003.

<sup>378</sup> joshua neuman 2010.

<sup>379</sup> jessie 2004 a.

the 1980s through a radical Jewish artistic renaissance to the success of this reggae artist, who, in the words of Magid, “made Hasidism ‘cool’ for a non-Jewish audience”.<sup>380</sup> Lisa Klug sees that a big turning point in the process of Jewishness becoming a cool feature happened when Matisyahu, whose outfit and being were distinctively Jewish, released his album *Shake Off the Dust... Arise* in 2005 and went into mainstream with his music.<sup>381</sup> Magid also suggests that such phenomena that have reached Jews and non-Jews alike, like the popularity of Matisyahu, the Klezmer phenomenon and for example the rise of Jewish studies in universities, led towards a situation where Judaism was not solely a property of the Jewish people.<sup>382</sup> When non-Jews have begun to enjoy and do Jewish things, Judaism is no longer only a thing for Jews.

One visible example of the trend was a selection of websites and companies that began to promote and sell “Jewish merchandise” for those young Jews who wanted to express their Jewishness through their clothing. Among these were for example *jewcy.com* and *rabbisdaughters.com*, that sold products such as Jewish-themed t-shirts with slogans. These websites were mentioned in *Heeb* articles,<sup>383</sup> and in Lisa Klug’s book.

Lisa Klug published her book *Cool Jew – The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe* in 2008. At that time, *Heeb* had been published for six years. In an interview in 2008 on QTV, Klug said that it was cooler than ever to be a Jew.<sup>384</sup> Soon the phenomenon was noticed by other media as well. In 2009, CNN published a long report about “New Jews” – young Jews of the Gen-X and Millennial generations – who were discovering their Jewish identities in new ways, such as tattoos, punk music, or media, such as *Heeb*.<sup>385</sup> The news was noticed also in the *Heeb* blog, with a headline: “Jews are cool, CNN reports”.<sup>386</sup> In the CNN article, scholars such as Steven Cohen and Jonathan Sarna commented on the phenomenon and raised the question of whether Judaism can stay together by relying only on cultural ties. These young generations of Jews expressed their Jewishness in the ways they wanted, and did not stick only to the traditional forms, such as remembering the Holocaust and supporting Israel. This

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<sup>380</sup> Magid 2013, 28.

<sup>381</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

<sup>382</sup> Magid 2013, 37, 264.

<sup>383</sup> E.g. rebecca 2007 g.

<sup>384</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

<sup>385</sup> Ravitz 2009.

<sup>386</sup> Abrams 2009.

underlined the fact that more than ever before, it was a matter of choice whether one wanted to be Jewish or not. As 37-year-old (by 2009) Shawn Landres said:

I could wake up tomorrow and say, 'I don't want to be Jewish.' There would be no social, political or economic consequences.<sup>387</sup>

The controversial *Heeb* cover with Roseann Barr playing Hitler was also mentioned in the article, and Joshua Neuman, the chief editor by that time, commented on that by telling how *Heeb* was aiming to elicit discussion.<sup>388</sup>

As noted earlier in this study, *Commentary* published an article by David G. Myers about cool Jews – or more precisely, “hipster Judaism” – in 2009. In his words, hipster Jews found it “cool to be Jewish because it is cool to be different”.<sup>389</sup> Myers criticized the way the movement treated Judaism and the Jewish tradition. He wrote about *Heeb* in a despising tone. As an example, he first listed which famous Jewish artists, musicians and intellectuals the magazine had interviewed, such as Sarah Silverman, Noam Chomsky and Al Franken, and then stated that the magazine did not promote Jewish writers or artists:

Unlike earlier and more influential Jewish journals, *Heeb* is not interested in providing an outlet for Jewish thought or introducing Jewish writers and artists to a wider public.<sup>390</sup>

Myers' point was also that none of the contributors of *Heeb* had “established an independent reputation” so far and the problem of the hipster movement was generally a lack of ambition and will to take an active role in the society. Meaningful or not, it somehow consolidates Myers' critical stance that he also misspelled Jennifer Bleier's name as Breyer. Myers considered that Matisyahu's music was nearly a perfect expression of the values of the hipster Judaism movement, as it was proudly Jewish but with a wide spectrum of references to other styles, but then he added almost derisively: “— even if most hipster Jews will never be as religious as he”.<sup>391</sup> It becomes clear that Myers did not appreciate the ways in which these young Jews tried to create their own expressions of Jewishness. In the end of the article, he expressed that from the outset, he was already against the idea that being a Jew was a matter of choice – which was the trend that Lila Berman called “volitional Jewishness”. Myers put it bluntly: “Jews do not choose; they are chosen.”<sup>392</sup> However, as Berman wrote,<sup>393</sup> this trend

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<sup>387</sup> Ravitz 2009.

<sup>388</sup> Ravitz 2009.

<sup>389</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>390</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>391</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>392</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>393</sup> Berman 2009, 171.



became more common already in the 1970s and is one of the key aspects that has molded the Jewishness of the new generations of American Jews since then.

Myers concluded his article by stating that hipster Jews did not have much knowledge of the traditions of Judaism and thus did not understand “how radically their views betray the Jewish life”.<sup>394</sup> This is a perfect example of the differences of the younger and older generations of American Jewry. As the examples of the articles of *Heeb* show in this study, the writers of these texts were aware of the traditions and history of Jewish people. Often they challenged the traditional ways of looking at these aspects of Jewish life, and even more often they mainly wanted to make Jewish fun, as Joshua Neuman put it. Perhaps Myers looked at *Heeb* from the wrong angle. The mission of *Heeb* was not to become the “new *Commentary*” for the young, but to speak to the young, urban Jews in their own language, address topics that were meaningful for them, and to make Jewish fun, instead of transporting and adapting Jewish traditions to the world of hipster Jews. The centeredness of irony in the culture of these young Jews must have made it difficult for the “established” Jewish community to pin the movement down.

The study of Sarah Bunin Benor about young Jewish leaders in Los Angeles shows how these young Jews had similar tendencies as those young Americans who identified with the hipster culture. As mentioned in the last introduction chapter about the American culture, Lauren M. Alfrey concluded her study about hipster culture by stating that hipsterism was about being distinctive and “searching for authenticity”, which was seen for example by preferring local pubs to pub chains and fairtrade coffee over Starbucks.<sup>395</sup> Benor’s experience was that countercultural Jewish leaders for example preferred independent coffee shops over a Starbucks, and a world music concert over Beyoncé. According to Benor, this may arise “from a desire to distinguish themselves from the mainstream and align themselves with others in their peer networks,” who had – one would assume – similar preferences.<sup>396</sup> In the same work about young Jewish adults, Sylvia Barack Fishman pointed out that young Jewish musicians and culture shapers also had a tendency to express themselves in ways that they saw as “authentic.”<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Myers 2009.

<sup>395</sup> Alfrey 2010, 67.

<sup>396</sup> Benor 2011, 133–134.

<sup>397</sup> Fishman et al 2011, 196.

An issue four of 2007 of *Shofar – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* tackled the topic of cool Jewishness from a variety of viewpoints. Samanta Baskind wrote about the theme through the film *Meet the Fockers* (2004), which is a sequel of *Meet the Parents* (2000). In *Meet the Fockers*, Jewish actors Ben Stiller, Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand played a Jewish family, who were, Baskind argues, “the good guys”, or “the hip characters” of the film.<sup>398</sup> Baskind continued the theme by pointing out that Judaism had become more visible in the popular culture through coverage in various tv-series and theatre plays. Especially in New York in early 2005, there was a variety of theatre productions with Jewish content, such as Mel Brooks’ *The Producers* and other less known works.<sup>399</sup>

Baskind questions the statement of Jewish becoming cool by explaining that Jewish characters played by such Jewish actors as Ben Stiller or Adam Sandler were cool only to Jews. In her opinion, these characters, along with for example Jerry Seinfeld, were objectively still clumsy and uncool. According to Baskind, Jewish features did not prevent Jews of achieving success any longer – as was the case earlier in the history of popular culture – but it was not because Jews were cool but because being different was cool. This tendency could be seen for example in the fact that during that time, most admired beauties like Selma Hayek and Penelope Cruz were Latinas, which was considered exotic. However, Baskind acknowledges that Jewishness did to some degree become cool in the minds of non-Jews as well, for example through the spread of Yiddish phrases in common language, which had happened already for decades though.<sup>400</sup>

The same issue of *Shofar* included articles about Jewish figures such as Sarah Jessica Parker and Tony Kushner. The writers Michele Byers and Rosalin Krieger argued that Parker was a cool Jew, and discussed this theme through Parker’s career and the tv-series *Sex and the City*, in which she made her most famous role as Carrie Bradshaw.<sup>401</sup> In the same issue, there was also the article by Laurence Roth<sup>402</sup> about *Heeb* as a representative of oppositional Jewish culture, which is handled in the sub-chapter about the Jewishness in *Heeb*. These research articles show that the phenomenon of cool Jewishness was acknowledged, but it

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<sup>398</sup> Baskind 2007, 3.

<sup>399</sup> Baskind 2007, 8–10.

<sup>400</sup> Baskind 2007, 10–14.

<sup>401</sup> Byers & Rosalin 2007.

<sup>402</sup> Roth 2007.

has not been widely addressed, especially not from the viewpoint of young Jews, with the exception of Roth's article.

To conclude this discussion about the coolness of Jewishness, I turn to quite a recent survey about the topic. According to a survey by Pew Research Center in 2014, in the United States, members of other faith traditions tended to feel more positive about Jews than about any other religious group, excluding their own. Especially white Evangelical Christians felt warmly about Jews, which likely connects with the Christian Zionist tradition. However, Jews tend to feel clearly more negatively about the Evangelicals.<sup>403</sup> The survey was commented on by the Jewish journalist Emma Green in *The Atlantic* magazine, in an article titled "Americans Say Jews Are the Coolest". Green listed Seinfeld, Jewish celebrities in Hollywood and Adam Sandler's hit *Hanukkah Song* as some of the reasons for the "coolness status" that American Jewry had achieved. She also reminded readers that this had definitely not always been the case. American Jews had come a long way from the anti-Semitic atmosphere at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the difficulties during and after the Second World War, and later trying to cope with the legacy of the Holocaust. During the recent decades, Jewish items and characters had become an accepted part and a commonplace within American popular culture.<sup>404</sup> These patterns that Green presented somehow explain how the Jewishness of young American Jews took its form in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The identity of the young Jews could not be built on the fear of anti-Semitism and discrimination, as it often was for previous generations. The attitude towards Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century America was very different compared with the American society where the earlier generations lived. This shift enabled for example the "cool Jewishness" phenomenon to emerge. This phenomenon molded the Jewishness of those young Jews who lived within the urban sphere where the phenomenon was most present. It would seem that this trend helped urban, young Jews to come up with such new expressions of Jewishness that mixed popular culture and trends with bits of Jewish traditions.

## **2. Lisa Klug's interpretation of cool Jewishness**

Lisa Alcalay Klug's *Cool Jew – The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe* offers an interesting example of a way to present Jewishness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As it is titled, the book is a guidebook of how to perform and celebrate

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<sup>403</sup> Pew Research Center 2014.

<sup>404</sup> Green 2014.

one's Jewishness. In a funny and open-minded way, the book explains features of Judaism, like how to behave in Jewish celebrations, how to become *baal teshuva*<sup>405</sup> and how to use Yiddish expressions in speech. The book looks like a schoolbook as it has scores of illustrations, lists and charts, and several assignments where the reader can match two lists together, for example Yiddish terms with their translations. Yiddish is one of the most noticeable characteristics in Klug's style. In many occasions through the book, she used Yiddish or Hebrew words instead of obvious English terms that could be used. For example, lists with ten items were called *minyans*, which refers to the *minyan*<sup>406</sup> of Jews that are required for a Jewish public worship.

First of all, the book intends to be light to read. It is humorous and inclusive. This inclusive style is probably partly a "promotional trick" to make her book approachable to all possible audiences but one also gets the feeling that she was sincerely inclusive in her views about being a Jew. In the foreword of the book, she welcomed every reader:

It doesn't matter what kind of Jew you are: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, a little religious, a lot religious, not religious at all, not Jewish, Jew-friendly, old, or young. You're welcome whether you are a strongly identified Jew, more Jew-ISH, an Honorary Heeb, an ally or a deprived Mid-westerner who has never actually met a live one.<sup>407</sup>

In an interview on QTV in 2008, Klug said that being a cool Jew is "about any way that you find to connect to who you are, your heritage, your community and yourself". She saw it as a personal choice to decide in which way to connect with Jewishness.<sup>408</sup> Klug supported the idea that Judaism is not a matter of what you wear but what is inside. She mentioned this at the beginning of the pages where she presented various webshops where one can buy t-shirts and accessories with Jewish themes.<sup>409</sup> This idea reflects the pattern explained by Debra Renee Kaufman; that Judaism for many young Jews was an "inner thing".<sup>410</sup>

An illustration of a Jewish wedding offers a good example of Klug's humor. With a repeating joke about the attendants of a wedding, she was able to swiftly explain some main differences of the denominations of Judaism. The list is as follows: 1) If the bride is Conservative, she is pregnant. 2) If the mother of the bride is Orthodox, she is pregnant. 3) If the rabbi is Reform, she is pregnant. 4) If

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<sup>405</sup> *Baal teshuva* means a returnee to a Jewish law; one who turns Orthodox or Hasidic from another Jewish denomination. "A born-again Jew", in a way.

<sup>406</sup> Ten male Jews over the age of 13; in non-Orthodox synagogues women count as well.

<sup>407</sup> Klug 2008, xviii.

<sup>408</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

<sup>409</sup> Klug 2008, 80.

<sup>410</sup> Kaufman 2005, 177.

the groom is Reconstructionist, she is pregnant.<sup>411</sup> By 2008, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism had accepted the ordination of women, and the Reconstructionist Judaism was the only denomination so far that had fully accepted same-sex marriage.

Behind all the humor, Klug seems to have honestly wanted to teach the reader and actually give advice for those who want to explore their Jewish heritage and Jewish belief more. Klug wrote in the foreword:

— this book decodes contemporary Judaism and its hippest forms of cultural expression. At a time when it's never been more delicious to be Jewish, it is designed as a field manual for twenty-first-century Jews and the people who love them.<sup>412</sup>

Klug's book has another subtitle: “aka the Heebster Handbook”. “Heebster” is a word Klug invented. As explained in the foreword, it is a combination of the words “Heeb”, which used to be a pejorative word for a Jew, but has been reclaimed as a term,<sup>413</sup> and “hipster”, which refers to a sub-culture that emerged at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in New York. With Heebster she means “someone who loves being Jewish, who is not afraid to be a total dork but who also has that certain Jewish *savoir faire* that makes him or her hipper than hip”.<sup>414</sup> The term seems to be a way to “rebrand” Judaism for a younger audience. In a way, Klug was marketing Judaism and other expressions of Jewishness with her book.

The concept of Heebster means a Jew who is proud of his or her Jewishness. To define the term, Klug used lists of things that are considered “Heebster” or “un-Heebster”. The trend in the lists was to proudly carry and perform features of Judaism or Jewish tradition: for example keeping kosher, eating and enjoying traditional Jewish food, and appreciating the use of Yiddish words and for example *yarmulkes*.<sup>415</sup> In addition, Klug presented Jewish “merchandise”, such as T-shirts with Jewish playing-with-words like “Jewcy” or “Sephardilicious” and the fan products of the *Heeb* magazine.<sup>416</sup>

In the book, there was also a *minyan* of “Heebster Hobbies”, which was an interesting mix of humor and in some way quite serious things. The list included for example feeding (one’s spouse, kids, neighbors, the homeless, Africa) and

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<sup>411</sup> Klug 2008. 42–43.

<sup>412</sup> Klug 2008, xvii.

<sup>413</sup> Such as “queer” among gay people, Klug explained in Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

<sup>414</sup> Klug 2008, xvii.

<sup>415</sup> I.e. kippahs. Klug prefers to use the Yiddish word *yarmulke*.

<sup>416</sup> Klug 2008, 4–5, 8–10, 80–82.

praying (in *shul*<sup>417</sup> but also “that this diet will finally work”). Other items were more unusual, like collecting (mainly all kinds of useless stuff, but also family history and *bar mitzvahs*), creating (theories, wealth), and mocking, for example the *goyim*,<sup>418</sup> “antisemities” (as Klug writes the word), but also “ourselves”, referring to the importance of self-irony in the Jewish tradition.<sup>419</sup> This list consisted of many significant features of Klug’s style of presenting Jewishness. A cool Jew, as interpreted by Klug, should do funny things, collect random items and be creative. A cool Jew should also feed his or her family and the poor, and pray in a synagogue. A cool Jew also mocks non-Jews and antisemites, and in that way is proud of his or her Jewishness, but does not forget self-irony.

Another theme under the concept of Heebster were the celebrities who were referred to as Heebsters. There was a long list of known Jews who, Klug explained, had been Heebsters in their own time and were phases of the “Evolution of Heebster”. There were contemporary celebrities, such as Sarah Jessica Parker, Barbra Streisand, Fran Drescher – who produced TV series *The Nanny* in the 1990s – and Madonna, who had recently got into Kabbalah. There was Primo Levi, known author and Holocaust survivor, and then there was the reggae artist Matisyahu, who was actually the first name on the list.<sup>420</sup> Elsewhere in the book there is an assignment where the reader can compare verses of songs by Bob Marley and Matisyahu and try to tell which one belongs to which repertoire.<sup>421</sup> This tells something about the status to which Matisyahu was elevated as a representative of Judaism in the popular culture. He might not have been as famous as Madonna or Barbra Streisand, but unlike them, he was Hasidic, an Orthodox Jew, a Jew who openly expressed his Jewish faith and used it in his music. In the chapter about prayer, Klug presented *The Thing from the Fantastic Four* in a scene of a graphic novel story where he recited a Jewish prayer.<sup>422</sup> Name-dropping celebrities and Marvel heroes seems to be one way of making Jewishness cool, but admiring Madonna because of her interest in Kabbalah does not seem as desired a result for Klug as admiring Matisyahu for his devotion to Hasidic Judaism.

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<sup>417</sup> Yiddish term for a synagogue.

<sup>418</sup> Yiddish term for non-Jews.

<sup>419</sup> Klug 2008, 148.

<sup>420</sup> Klug 2008, 10.

<sup>421</sup> Klug 2008, 169.

<sup>422</sup> Klug 2008, 126.

In the interview on QTV, the interviewer Jian Ghomeshi challenged Klug by saying that according to the book, it seems that everyone is Jewish: almost every celebrity seems to be on the list of famous Jews and in the interview Klug indicates that anyone who buys the book is an “honorary member of the tribe”.<sup>423</sup> Ghomeshi’s notion is well-founded. The idea that any “cool” person can be an “honorary member of the tribe” somehow diminishes the credibility of Klug’s mission. When her mission was for the readers to be able to embrace their Jewishness more firmly, it does not seem like the best strategy to add in every interesting person who somehow “acts Jewishly” by being “cool”. Klug’s book seems to be a mixture of inclusiveness and promoting a “more Jewish” lifestyle.

In parts of the book, Klug seems very inclusive towards several traditions, such as Hinduism or Rastas. However, in most cases, her tone was quite negative when she wrote about things related to Christianity. When explaining ways to reuse *challah* bread, Klug wrote they can be a “substitute for *Torah*-Yoga blocks to express the HinJew in you”.<sup>424</sup> In the picture of Sheebster and Heebster, Sheebster’s necessities include yoga pants.<sup>425</sup> In a chapter titled “Members of the Tribe”, there was a chart in which Klug compared the groups that claim they were the lost tribes of Israel and thus related to Judaism: Rastas, Native Americans and Hippies. Then followed lists of reasons why Jews were related to various groups like the Japanese (“They got Buddha. We come from Judah.”), and Rappers (“Both have deep tribal identification.”). In addition, the Vulcans from Star Trek had their own sub-chapter in Klug’s book. The actor of Spock, Leonard Nimoy, was Jewish, and the famous Vulcan greeting has its origins in the *Torah*.<sup>426</sup>

It is interesting how Klug wanted to show, of course not in a very exhaustive or deep way, the similarities between Jews, who were a special, trendy and distinguishable group, and other exotic or popular groups. It underlines the fact that Jewishness was – or Klug wanted it to be seen as – something special, cool, and not in the same continuity with mainstream religions like Christianity and Islam. As Samantha Baskind remarked in her *Shofar* article that addressed cool Judaism, it was not that Jewishness itself was cool, but that difference was cool. Jewish was cool because difference was cool.<sup>427</sup> However, it would not seem

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<sup>423</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

<sup>424</sup> Klug 2008, 71.

<sup>425</sup> Klug 2008, 8.

<sup>426</sup> Klug 2008, 168–171.

<sup>427</sup> Baskind 2007, 13–14.

reasonable that Judaism would emphasize its similarities with the religions that came after it, unlike the way that Christianity can talk about its Jewish origins.

Klug wrote: “Since Jews don’t proselytize, that makes us even cooler. Everybody is looking for a way in.”<sup>428</sup> These sentences, which are likely written in a somewhat light manner, perhaps reveal something important in Klug’s attitude and mission. It again emphasized the particularity of Judaism and indicated that Judaism was something cool which everyone wanted to belong to but could not. Pointing out that Jews do not proselytize sets Judaism apart especially from the biggest world religions, Christianity and Islam.

Islam does not appear in Klug’s book and when Christianity is mentioned, it is usually not a positive case. There are several examples of this. First, she discussed about a legend that a rabbi known as Reb Raphael had befriended the pope in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and when visiting the Vatican, he had seen treasures that were stolen from the Temple of Jerusalem already during the era of the Roman Empire. Klug concluded the chapter with strangely aggressive-sounding sentences:

Is this tale fact or fiction? Does it even matter? Since when did the Vatican give anything back to Jews?! Vatican or Vati’Wont?<sup>429</sup>

Similar rhetorics are seen later in the chapter that deals with the Christian New Testament:

Like a pain in the Lower Mongolian Nether Regions, the text explicitly condemns Jewish religious practices. Uh huh, right there in the drawer of every *goyish* hotel room. Forget that \$#\*%!<sup>430</sup>

Soon after Klug referred to seeing Jesus as “Eisegesis”, reading ones own ideas into a biblical text.<sup>431</sup> These sections are interesting compared with the more usual feeling of inclusiveness that Klug’s writing produces. The latter two examples are from the section that deals with anti-Semitism and of course, there are many aspects in the Christian tradition that can be justifiably condemned in that case. Still, harsh words among the basic humorous style do surprise the reader; especially when Klug promotes the book to everyone, for example for those who have Jewish partners and are perhaps themselves Christians.

Even if Klug was inclusive, several parts of the work indicate that she supported traditional values to some degree. It was not suitable to organize orgies and Klug’s sentence “G-d is into One-ness in more ways than one” indicates that

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<sup>428</sup> Klug 2008, 168.

<sup>429</sup> Klug 2008, 155–156.

<sup>430</sup> Klug 2008, 210.

<sup>431</sup> Klug 2008, 210–212.



it was not acceptable to have sex with many partners. When Klug presented and explained the ten commandments, she did retain the original ideas. Her wording made them sound more funny and light in a way, but it did not diminish the original meaning. The same commandments to not idolize anyone or anything else than God and not “presume any ancient Jewish belief is outdated” are still there in the new wording.<sup>432</sup> It seems that even if she wanted to accept every kind of reader of the book, she was definitely not promoting secular Judaism as “the cool Jewishness”. She for example stated:

— the best way to celebrate life as a Heebster is to ignore New Year’s, Christmas, Halloween, Valentine’s Day, and every other *goyish* holiday with *farkakte*<sup>433</sup> pagan roots —<sup>434</sup>

Cool Jewishness for Klug was to be a proud Jew who accepts the basic tenets of Judaism but perhaps does not take everything seriously. Being a cool Jew meant that you can make string bikinis out of kippas – Klug gives instructions for that<sup>435</sup> – and have fun with the Jewish tradition, but you still proudly present the fact that you are Jewish and believe in God and the basic teachings of the *Torah*.

The idea of cool Jewishness also seems to be one answer to the challenge of how to preserve the significance of Jewishness among young American Jews. In a way, Lisa Klug tries to answer the problem with the tools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: openness, humor and irony. This idea was also indicated in the interview on QTV.<sup>436</sup> However, as noticed, Klug supported traditional values and opposed for example celebrating non-Jewish holidays. Due to this, it is questionable whether she was able to promote “cool Jewishness” and preserve Judaism, when she was not as open towards liberal views and traditionally non-Jewish cultural features as many young Jews in the spheres of influence of *Heeb* and *New Voices* might have been.

Lisa Klug’s *Cool Jew* was indeed a guidebook for a Jew in the modern world. It appeared inclusive and in many ways it surely was. Nevertheless, it did seem to condemn several things, such as bad morals, dismissing the basic teachings of the *Torah*; and most of the things that in any way relate to Christianity. In the positive sense, it encouraged Jews, especially young Jews who seem to have been the main audience for the book, to be proud of their

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<sup>432</sup> Klug 2008, 117–119.

<sup>433</sup> Yiddish for lousy, ridiculous or in spoken language, “shitty” or “full of crap”.

<sup>434</sup> Klug 2008, 124.

<sup>435</sup> Klug 2008, 57.

<sup>436</sup> Cool Jews on QTV 2008.

Jewishness. On the one hand, this meant listening to Matisyahu, doing *Torah*-yoga and having fun with things connected to Jewish tradition. On the other hand, it seems to have meant to appreciate Jewish belief and the *Torah*, not to celebrate non-Jewish holidays and in other ways not to totally adapt to the surrounding modern culture.

“When a book calls itself “cool”, you know it’s gonna be lame.” This is how Michele Hirsch titled her review of Klug’s book in *New Voices* in September 2008. Hirsch did not mince her words in criticizing the book’s attitude and message. She accepted that Klug might have had sincere intentions, but it is clear that she was highly critical towards Klug’s attempts to “help those suffering from low Judeo-esteem”. Inside-jokes, “forced hipness” and what Hirsch called the “don’t be a Bad Jew” tactic did not appeal to young readers, but instead might have caused the opposite reaction. Hirsch wrote:

Klug leaves little room for those of us who shy away from synagogue, or who date blonde atheists. — In sum: the Jewish people is a chosen one, and more kick-ass than the rest. Any other attitude equals “shame”.<sup>437</sup>

In this way, Klug’s book appeared as another, not successful attempt by the Jewish community to make young Jews engage more into their Judaism. Hirsch stated that it was exactly that attitude of seeing Jews as somehow better, chosen people and as a group in which it was cool and special to belong to that made some young Jews distance themselves from the established Jewish community.<sup>438</sup> The review by Hirsch is obviously just one example of the reception the book met with among young Jewry, but it resonates for example with the phrase of an interviewee of Debra Renee Kaufman that was cited in the second chapter: “It’s hard to think you’re part of a chosen people and still feel you’re part of all people.”<sup>439</sup> The idea of Jews as chosen people seems to have been outdated in the minds of the young Jews of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The critique against Klug’s style of writing somehow also links with the younger generation’s opposition of obligation. For them, the feeling of being obliged to participate and engage more in the American Jewish community was something that likely estranged them from the established Jewish community instead of attracting.

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<sup>437</sup> Hirsch 2008.

<sup>438</sup> Hirsch 2008.

<sup>439</sup> Kaufman 2005, 178.

## VI Conclusions

Young Jews in the 1960s began to question their parents' generation's lifestyle for example by producing popular culture that critically addressed the topic. Young Jews in the early 2000s were again more progressive than previous generations in several aspects and they moved Judaism to new directions. It is no news that new generations protest the views and habits of previous generations, as it seems like a natural process. This trend has perhaps had especially much significance to the entity of Judaism, however. Judaism as a religious community has relied on the shared history of Jewish people, and traditions of doing things – instead of sharing beliefs in common – in order to express belonging to a community and in order to preserve the Jewish heritage. Furthermore, Judaism is a community which due to its history has remained concerned of its continuity and existence, and a community that does not expand through a missionary work. In these circumstances, the new generations that undervalue the cherishing of traditions or do not oppose marrying outside faith, which can potentially lead to a lack of engagement to Jewish community, understandably raise anxiety and questions about the very meaning of Judaism and significance of Jewishness for Jews in the postmodern world.

What I find one of the most interesting findings of this study is that the young American Jews acknowledged the role that was given to them by older generations, and criticized it. They did not only want to be the “torchbearers” of Judaism but wanted to find their own ways of being Jewish, and to express their Jewishness in a way that felt natural for them and embrace those aspects they found suitable. This tendency was seen already by for example Debra Renee Kaufman and Shaul Magid when they stated that Judaism will survive but change, and that the research should not stick too much to words like “authenticity” or “tradition”. Contrary to the previous Jewish generations, this young generation felt increasingly less that as Jews they had a special status as “chosen people”. Instead, following the idea of “volitional Jewishness”, they felt that they were able to choose whether they were Jews or not; and if they were, they could decide it by themselves how to do it. This idea was seen in many instances: in the inclusive style of *Heeb*; in the JDub Records' founder Aaron Bisman's words when he said that he wanted Judaism to matter to young Jews “in whatever way”; in the

writings of the editors of *New Voices*; and even in the introductory words of Lisa Klug's *Cool Jew*, even if her agenda was somewhat criticized by young Jews.

As found out in the previous studies and as seen in this study, especially in the material from *New Voices*, the feeling of obligation did not make young Jews support similar causes as the older generation did; namely, opposing intermarriage and supporting Israel. Young Jews acknowledged that these were important themes to most American Jews of the older generation, who considered that supporting these causes was essential to being Jewish. Young Jews also faced pressure to support these attitudes.

The rising rates of intermarriage were one of the central changes in American Jewish culture when moving from the 1990s to the new millennium. The younger generation of Jews did not consider it as threatening a phenomenon as the previous generations did. The editors of *New Voices* addressed the topic in several instances and criticized the way in which the Jewish community tried to tackle the issue. One of the *New Voices* writers, Amanda Milstein, explained that in her social circles, it was considered old-fashioned to choose a partner based on religion. When young Jews were increasingly integrated in the American culture, met non-Jews as easily as Jews, and did not consider themselves as a part of the “chosen people”, it seems understandable that the intermarriage rates rose but also that for young Jews, the arguments for dating and marrying only Jews felt invalid. No doubt, Jewish scholars, who are themselves representatives of the older generation of American Jews, will continue researching the reasons for the risen rates of intermarriage and its consequences. On the other hand, younger generation of Jewish scholars will probably look for new ways of addressing the issue. Through the process of writing this work, it has been interesting to see how different scholars, who are part of the American Jewish community, posit themselves in relation to the topics they research. In some instances – such as in the reports about dating and marrying habits of young American Jews, or in the studies about young Jews' relationship with Israel – it has been easy to see a certain degree of bias in their works.

Young American Jews' attitudes towards Israel has been another key theme in this study. *New Voices* attempted to be, as one of the editors put it, “critically pro-Israel”. In the writings of the editors of both *Heeb* and *New Voices*, it can be seen that they opposed unconditional support of Israel. In *New Voices*, they also criticized the pro-Israel “propaganda” aimed at young Jews. One of the

manifestations of the Jewish community's attempts to affect young American Jews' views on issue was the Birthright Israel program. On the pages of *New Voices*, there were both critical and supportive voices commenting on the program itself and the way these trips to Israel were organized and carried out. The editors of *New Voices* acknowledged the fact that, in many cases, Israel still had a special meaning to some Jewish college students and grown-ups alike. They presented both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine views on the conflict in Israel and also tried to find solutions to the conflicts at campuses between students with different views.

As the sources reveal, young American Jews were often critical towards Israel and a special relationship with Israel was not as meaningful for them as it was for previous American Jewish generations. Young Jews that can be seen in the sources of this study were integrated into surrounding culture and for the most part shared a similar, often liberal worldview with their non-Jewish peers. In this worldview, it was common to take a critical attitude towards Israeli policies. As the news in *New Voices* reveal, especially in the academic world it was a commonplace to criticize Israeli policies and it was difficult to show any kind of support to Israel. In these circumstances, it seems reasonable that the young Jews' views also more easily turned into critical towards Israel, instead of the "blind support". This, however, did not necessarily mean that Israel would no longer have had significance to them or that they would not have understood the centrality that Israel had traditionally had in American Jewish culture. As the historian Bethamie Horowitz explained, the situation in Israel has become increasingly complicated since the beginning of the 1980s. Back then there was less information available, and there were no *intifadas* or failed peace negotiations yet. Along with the common opinion at campuses, this aspect helps to understand, why young Jews' relationship with Israel has become more complex and it was more difficult to adopt a fully supportive attitude in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The presidency of George W. Bush from 2001 to January 2009 was a time of polarization of values in the United States. Majority of the young Jews seems to have been on the opposite side of Bush and his supporters. *Heeb*, for example, criticized those in the American Jewish community who had traditionally supported the Democrats but began to support Bush because of his policies that were seen as favorable to Israel. Both magazines, *New Voices* and *Heeb*, published articles or interviews in which liberal values were presented, so at least the media of young Jews can be considered largely liberal. *New Voices*, as a

representative of a wider spectrum of young Jews, did, however, give coverage to differing views and also promoted the acceptance of varying views within the Jewish community.

To widen the picture, attitudes towards Israel link with the question of what significance did the history of Jewish people have for the young American Jews of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the articles in *New Voices*, it seems that young American Jews were well aware of the significance that Jewish history had to previous generations of American Jews. However, they struggled whether it should or should not have such a meaning for themselves. Some writers argued that Jewishness should no longer be built on fear and threat, as it was when anti-Semitism had a more central role in Jewish identity. In many occasions, these young Jewish writers criticized their parents' and grandparents' generations' attempts to make them build their Jewish identity so strongly on the tragic history of Jewish people, especially the Holocaust and the fear of anti-Semitism. Same pattern can be seen in *Heeb*, which built a picture of cool, urban Jew who laughed at stereotypes and was able to make humor of the Holocaust.

In general, there was not much discussion about Jewish faith in the sources of this study. *New Voices* presented several devotional young Jews, which shows that the magazine appreciated this side of Jewishness as well. However, when looking at the sources, the full picture hints that for young Jews, Jewish culture and traditions mattered more than the aspects of actual religiosity. The interviews that *Heeb* did with several Jewish celebrities and the way these interviewees discussed their ways of being Jewish suggest that *Heeb* supported personal and unusual ways of expressing Jewish faith.

How then did the Jewishness of young American Jews affect their everyday life? Concerning food culture, the sources of this study do not reveal awfully much. They hint, however, that some young Jews still considered keeping kosher a meaningful aspect of Jewishness, even if they did not only eat strictly kosher food. The material also hints that some young Jews, especially those involved with *Heeb*, were – as some of their non-Jewish peers – ethically aware eaters. Some *New Voices* texts also critically addressed the traditional Jewish food culture that occasionally had a negative impact on young Jews' eating habits. Concerning sexuality and gender, then, the writers of *Heeb* and *New Voices* took mainly a very positive stance towards sexual and gender minorities – as towards other minorities as well – and different forms of sexuality. In this they resembled

more their non-Jewish peers than older generations of Jews, even if there has traditionally been a positive attitude towards sexuality in the Jewish culture. However, it is of course possible that in their position as the editors of these magazines they represented only the most liberal young Jewish adults, even if it was a commonplace among this generation of Americans to have more accepting views on for example sexual minorities than the previous generations had.

What then, if anything, separated the *Heeb* editors, who could be seen as “cool New Yorkers” and hipsters, from the non-Jewish hipsters and other young adults of their time? Even if *Heeb* can be seen as inclusive and highly integrated into the surrounding New York culture and hipster culture, the contributors of the magazine were openly very Jewish as well. Nearly all of the interviews in the magazine were done with Jewish celebrities and they addressed Jewish themes. Many of the articles were humorous but also informative, and in most occasions the humor rose from Jewish themes and the articles could give the readers more knowledge about some aspect of Jewish history or culture.

For Lisa Klug, cool Jewishness was to be proud of one’s Jewishness and Jewish tradition. It seems that with her book, Klug tried to answer the unique challenge of American Judaism: how to preserve the Jewish culture without excluding itself out of the American culture. Klug’s attempt received a cold reception from the book’s reviewer Michele Hirsch in *New Voices*, which hints that her style was likely not appreciated among young Jews. On one hand, the phenomenon of cool Jewishness was a central part of the Jewish culture that *Heeb* presented and it is likely that it had significance to those who could be called “hipster Jews”. On the other hand, some young Jews considered the way in which Klug used cool Jewishness to be yet another attempt to engage young Jews more into their Jewishness and into American Jewish culture in the form that the established Jewish community found suitable.

Near the end of the process of writing this present work, I happened to find out about several other publications and websites for young Jewish adults that were published in the first decade of the 2000s. Among these were *Tablet* and the blog *Jewcy.com* that works under *Tablet*; the magazine *JVibe* that was published between 2004–2009; and the weblogs *Jewschool*, *Jewlicious*, *Frumsatire* and *hipsterjew.org*. For further studies on this topic, these could be added to the sources in order to have a more exhaustive picture of the media of young American Jews. In addition to this, it would be useful to interview some of the

creators of this Jewish media, perhaps some readers as well, and then compare their memories and views with the analysis of the texts found in these media.

To conclude this work: What significance did Jewishness have for young American Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In this study, I have given several answers to this. For the contributors and readers of *Heeb*, their Jewishness seemed to mean for them that they integrated into the surrounding urban culture and embraced some aspects of, but also proudly expressed their Jewishness. The variety of interviews in *Heeb* suggests that the editors appreciated influential Jewish people in academic and cultural circles, and enjoyed seeing themselves as part of that continuity of Jewish contributions to music, humor, arts, and science in American culture. That was the significance of Jewishness for them. *New Voices*, on the other hand, presented various young Jews in their texts and challenged young Jewish students to form their own views, whether they were pro-Israel or critical towards Israel, or whether they embraced devotional Judaism or a more secular stance towards their tradition. All in all, young American Jews at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were proud of their Jewishness. They embraced some aspects of Jewish culture, created new ways of expressing their Jewishness and took a critical stance towards some issues – such as opposing intermarriage and supporting Israel – that were central to the older generations of American Jews. It is easy to believe what Shaul Magid said: Judaism will survive, it will just look different than before.



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## VIII Index of names

Alfrey, Lauren M. - 20–21, 35, 107.

- the author of the Master's thesis about hipster culture, *The Search for Authenticity. How Hipsters Transformed from a Local Subculture to a Global Consumption Collective*.

Arafat, Yasir - 57–58.

- a Palestinian political leader.

Berman, Lila Corwin - 7–9, 14, 59, 79–81, 85, 106.

- Professor of History at Temple University.

Bisman, Aaron - 88–89, 117.

- the founder of JDub Records.

Bleyer, Jennifer - 3, 32–33, 35–36, 44, 67, 80, 86, 103–104, 106.

- the founder, publisher and editor of the *Heeb* magazine 2000–2003.

Bodzin, Jessie - 11, 34, 37.

- managing editor of the *Heeb* magazine 2003–2009.

Bruce, Lenny - 14, 44.

- Jewish stand-up comedian and social critic, active in the 1960s.

Bush, George W. - 17–19, 57–58, 63–66, 119.

- the President of the United States January 2001 – January 2009.

Clinton, Bill - 17, 57–58.

- the President of the United States January 1993 – January 2001

Cohen, Steven M. - 6, 10, 26–30, 32, 36, 39, 68, 77, 79, 81–84, 89, 105.

- Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy in Hebrew Union College.

Fishman, Sylvia Barack - 6, 27–28, 63, 92, 107.

- Professor in Judaic Studies in Brandeis University.

Gerson, Daniela - 10, 31, 45–46, 61, 72, 74–75, 78, 84–85, 89.

- a writer and associate editor of *New Voices* 2002–2003.

Harvis Renny, Melissa - 4, 19, 32, 45–48, 77, 87.

- an editor of *New Voices* 2002–2004.

Hirsch, Michele - 116, 121.

- the reviewer of *Cool Jew* in *New Voices*.

Horowitz, Bethamie - 78, 83, 119.

- Socio-psychologist, Research Assistant Professor in New York University.

Kaufman, Debra Renee - 22–23, 27–30, 83, 110, 116–117.



- Professor Emeritus, the founding director of the Women's Studies department at Northeastern University.
- Kelman, Ari Y. - 6, 23–24, 29, 50, 77, 84, 89.
- Associate Professor of Religious Studies in Stanford University.
- Kerry, John - 17, 65.
- The Democratic nominee in the 2004 presidential election.
- Klug, Lisa Alcalay - 1, 4–5, 11, 103–105, 110–116, 118, 121.
- journalist and the author of *Cool Jew – The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe*.
- Koufax, Sandy - 14, 40.
- Jewish baseball player in the 1960s, famously refused to pitch an important game in 1965 as it fell on Yom Kippur.
- Magid, Shaul - 6–7, 9, 24–26, 29–30, 81–83, 104–105, 117, 122.
- Professor of Jewish Studies in Indiana University Bloomington.
- Matisyahu (Matthew Miller) - 42, 88, 104–106, 112, 116.
- Hasidic reggae star, signed with JDub Records in 2004.
- Milstein, Amanda - 82–82, 98, 118.
- a contributor of *New Voices* 2005–2006.
- Myers, David G. - 7, 28, 34, 44, 64, 101, 106–107.
- *Commentary* writer, a critic of “hipster Judaism”.
- Nathan-Kazis, Josh - 46–47, 73–74, 77, 82, 84, 88–89, 94.
- an editor of *New Voices* 2007–2009.
- Neuman, Joshua - 33–34, 36, 101, 104, 106–107.
- the chief editor and CEO of the *Heeb* magazine 2003–2011.
- Parker, Sarah Jessica - 6, 19, 37, 43, 108, 112.
- American Jewish actress and a fashion icon.
- Ratzman, Elliot - 39, 100.
- a contributor of *Heeb* in 2004.
- Roth, Laurence - 2, 33, 43–44, 108–109.
- Professor of English in Susquehanna University.
- Seinfeld, Jerry - 19, 38, 90, 108–109.
- Jewish actor, best known for the TV series *Seinfeld*.
- Sharon, Ariel - 54, 64–65.
- the Prime Minister of Israel 2001–2006.
- Sichel, Ilana - 26, 47, 80.
- the chief editor of *New Voices* 2005–2007.

Silverman, Sarah - 36, 65, 96, 106.

- American Jewish stand-up comedian, actress and writer.

Unowsky, Cara - 74–75, 78, 85–86.

- an editor of *New Voices* 2004–2005.

Wertheimer, Jack - 6, 10, 29–20, 34, 77–78, 89.

- Professor of American Jewish history in The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.